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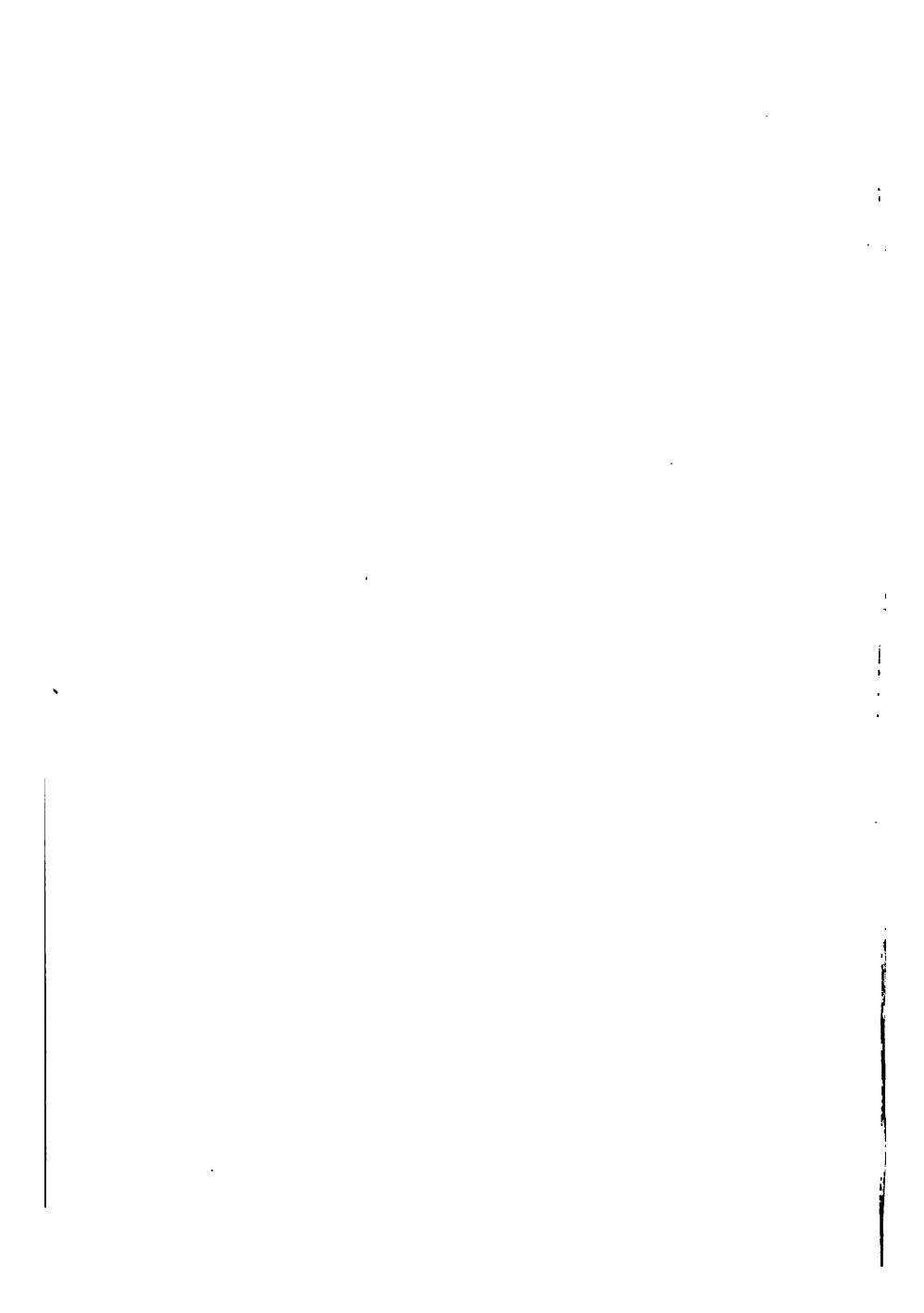
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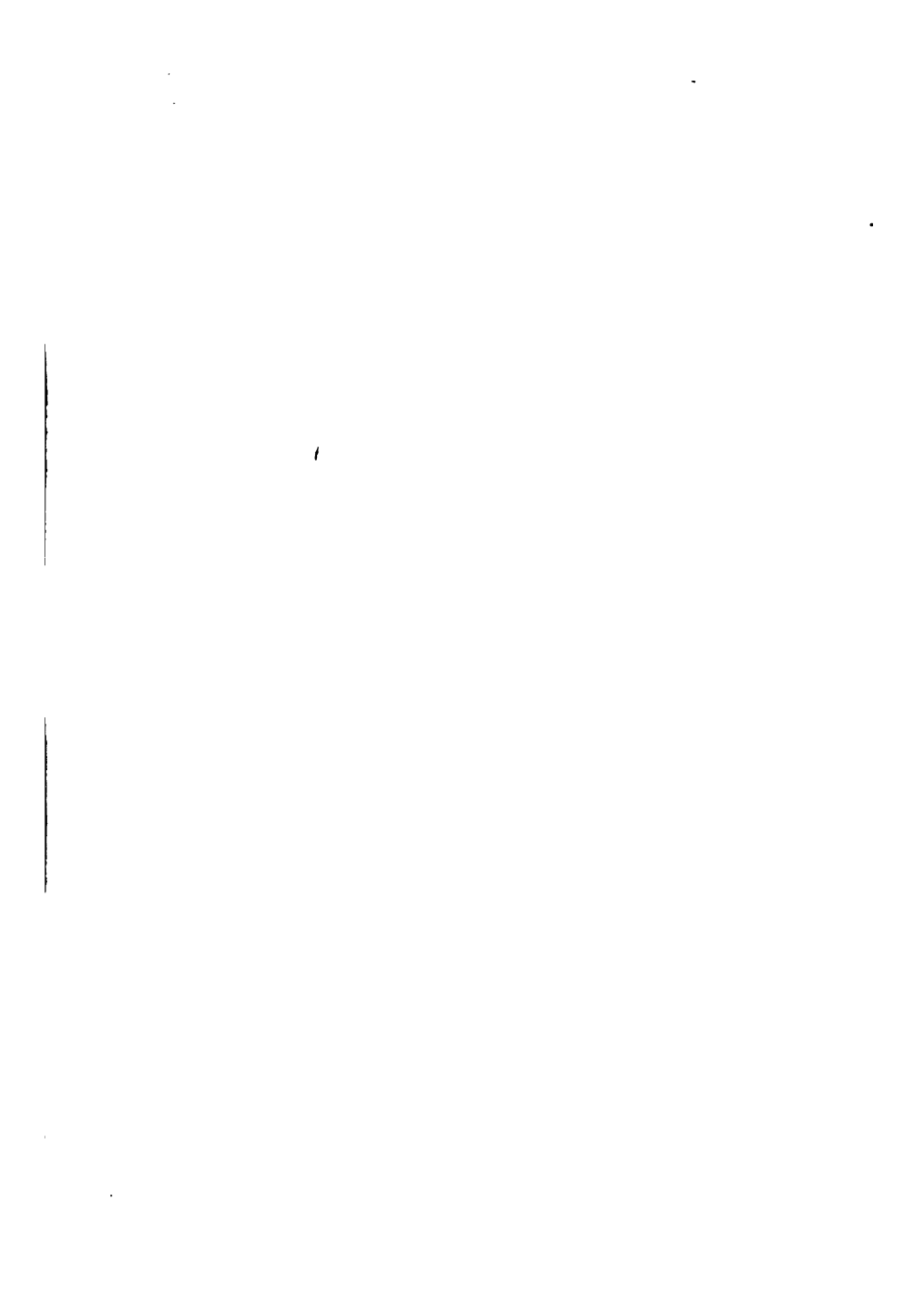
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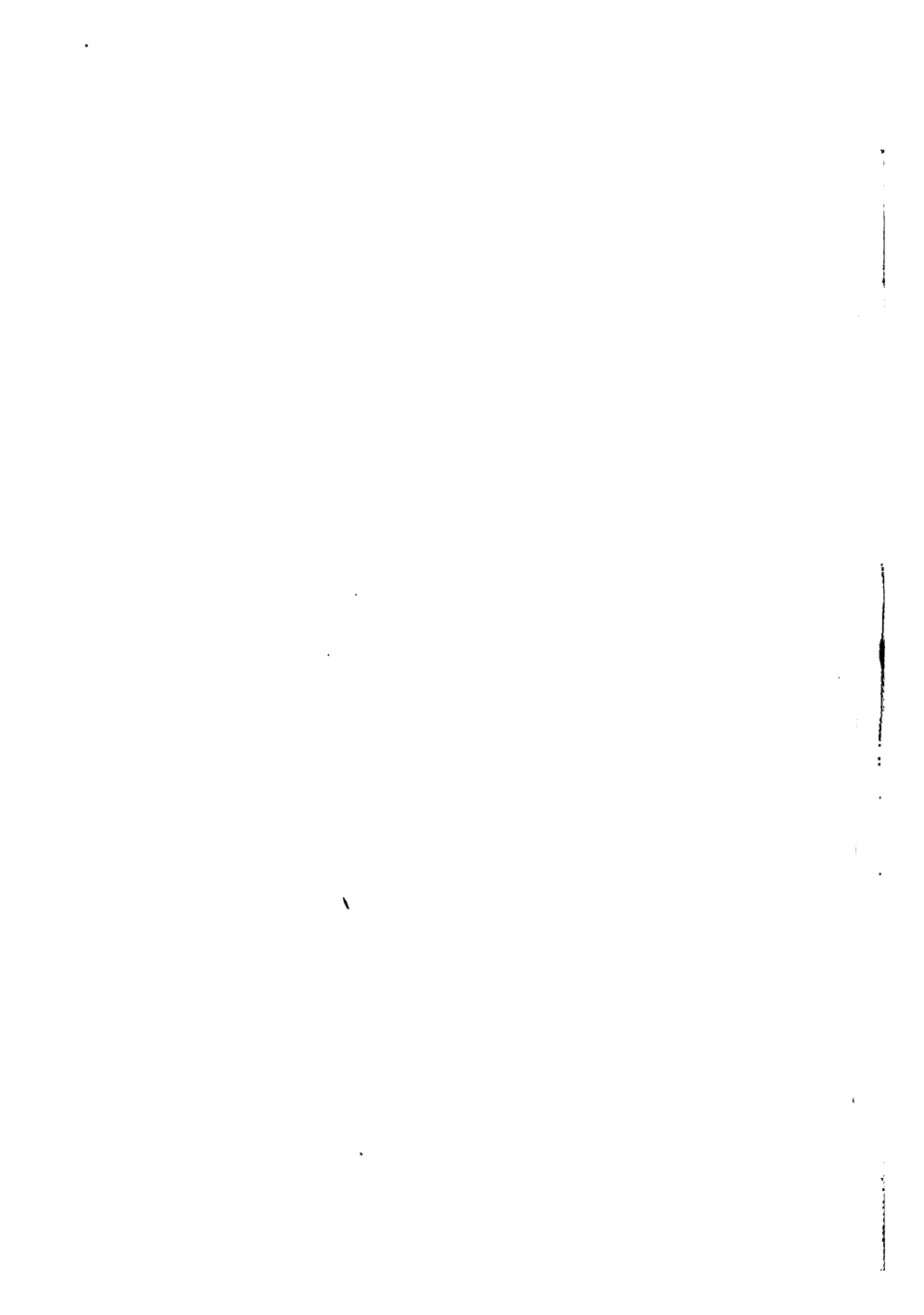
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NALC
Speaker







To Helen.

From Philip.

NALC

Spencer



WEIGHING THE SWEETS.

The Fortunes of Betty.

A SWEET AND TENDER ROMANCE
OF AN OLD SOLDIER'S DAUGHTER.

Novelized From the Successful Play of the
Same Name

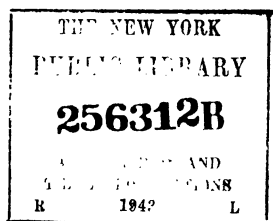
BY

CECIL SPOONER.^{or}

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The Fortunes of Betty.

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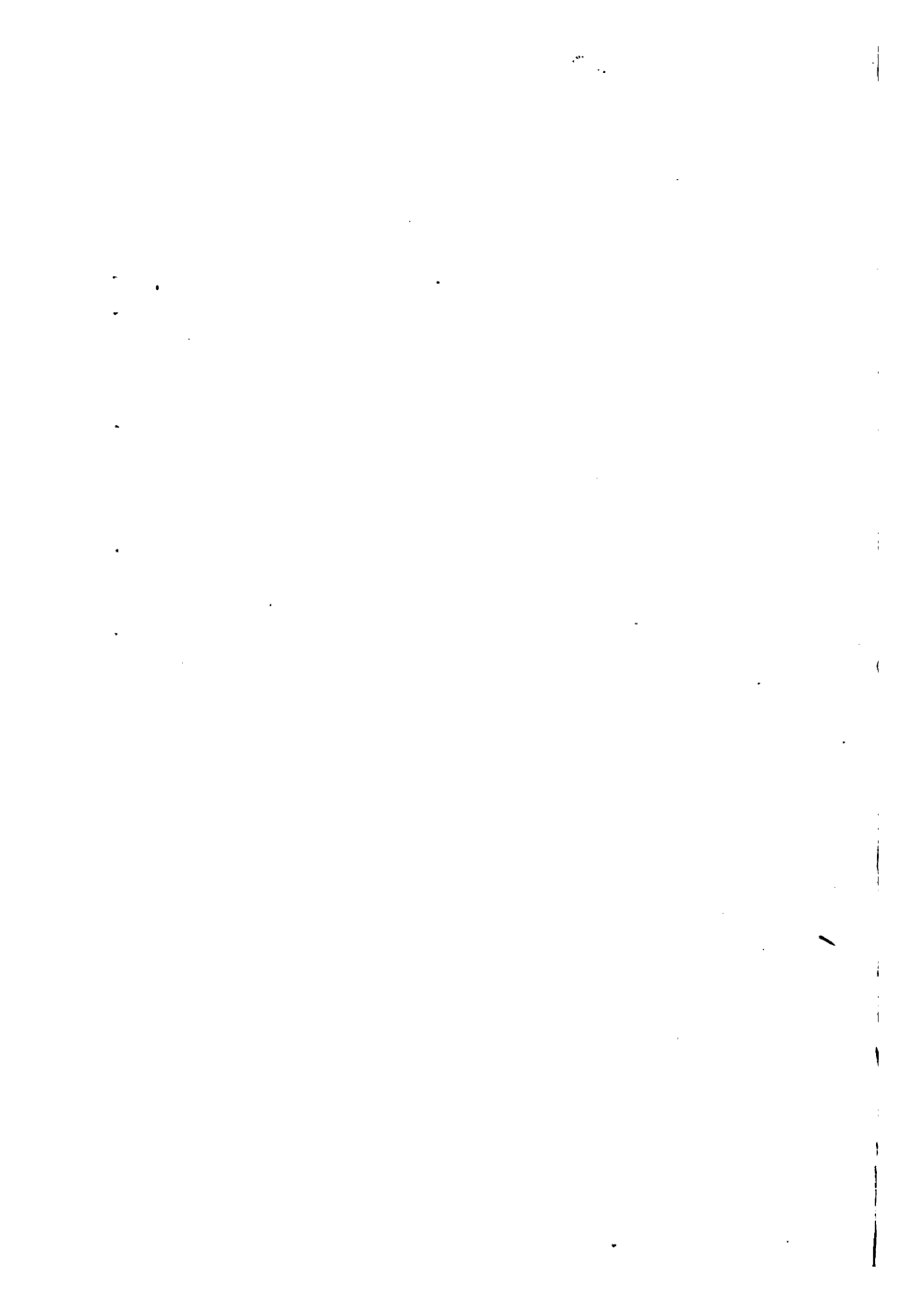
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THE FORTUNES OF BETTY

CHAPTER I

WHERE WE MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF SOME OF THE FOLKS

IT was nearly nine o'clock of a bright day in early Spring, with a hint of approaching warmth in the air. Far in the distance there was a faint sound of an approaching train, which broke sharply against the still morning air.

The beautiful valley lay asleep in a soft covering of haze, and the whole landscape was such as would have delighted the eye of an artist.

The railroad station was situated some two miles from the small town of Logan, which seemed calm and peaceful in the dim distance. A large, many-windowed building showed against the background of a verdant mountain down which danced a rollicking stream which gave power for the endless whirring machinery of a flour mill. Even at this distance a hum as of bees floated down the quiet valley from the factory where the workers had been busy for two long hours.

The young man at the station whose duty it was to attend to the newstand was also invested with the insignia of baggage master, and as he had an active mind he generally took upon himself many other trifling matters, doing everything that he undertook with an undeviating cheerfulness.

As he heard the faint throb of the coming train he cast his experienced eyes toward the road and watched the long line of mingled smoke and steam that lay lazily above the trees, as though it was too much trouble to mount.

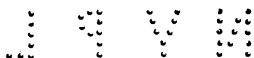
"Hum!" said Luke, the young man, "the smoke lays low. Guess I won't open out the books to-day. The papers—well, I can lift off the lid of the show case. There's sure to be rain."

As the wise young man busied himself in his leisurely fashion he sang in a clear and pleasant voice:

"There was a man named Bill,
And he lived on the side of a hill;
He ain't been sober,
Since last October
And, I don't think he ever will."

As he finished this song, conscientiously singing the supremely silly chorus, he brushed the dust from the glass show-case, and taking a morning paper sat down to read. Then, mindful of a duty, left unperformed, he hastily examined the penny-in-the-slot machine to be sure it was all right and in working order.

Satisfied on this point he resumed his inter-



rupted reading, paying no attention to a freight car which was standing on a siding within a few feet of him. It was an ordinary sight to see a closed freight car there and he gave it not a thought, yet that car held a secret which would have roused him as he had never been had it occurred to him to look on the inside of it. But as he did not, it stood there the most decorous and well-conducted freight car that had ever stood on that siding. So, he read, interspersing his reading with remarks all his own, and which he considered very clever.

"Yes, I guess I was pretty flip. I didn't go. They didn't copper any of my glittering gold. 'Busted, New York Comedy Company. Attached. Constable Jade Bender seized the trunks and scenery to satisfy claim of New York parties—actors escaped with part of their wardrobe—Constable gave chase but could not get them.' Gee, but this paper is getting right up to date! Look at them headlines! They could give some of them New York papers points. 'It is supposed that they jumped the freight for New York. It was good for the public that they busted. Only redeeming feature of the exhibition was the dancing of a blonde girl called Betty Bell. She took her part well, and wore gold shoes and pink stockings!' Well, I sawed the pictures of her anyway."

After a few more minutes of his reading the local paper, during which Luke continued his song mechanically, a young girl came puffing to the station, the first arrival. Puffing was the only

proper word to employ for she was so very plump, not to say fat, that it was a serious and difficult effort for her to walk, and she had been running. She had a very pretty face, and was extremely neat and tidy, while her perpetual good nature won her many friends. She labored under two other disadvantages, one being her name which was Slenderfish, and the other that she stuttered badly. It was almost impossible for her to speak the shortest sentence without such difficulty that she was always on the verge of tears. At other times she was the very picture of good nature. Her preferred occupation was reading the novels sold at the newstand. As she could not afford to purchase all the books she read, and there was no circulating library at Logan's Corners, she was permitted by Luke to read the books he had for sale, always with the proviso that if the woes of the heroines were too great she would be careful not to weep on the paper.

The young people of the town made so much fun of her name, her *advoirdupois* and her stammering that she secluded herself from them all she could, and at such times as her mother could spare her, for she was a good, dutiful girl and a willing worker, she passed at the station reading.

Luke Peterson had loved Sissy, as she was familiarly called, ever since they went to school together. She had always known it, and her honest little heart was fixed on Luke, and not even his constant teasing caused it to waver. Luke looked at her now, noted the rosy, dimpled and smiling face, and felt his heart warm towards her. But

knowing her difficulty he took it upon himself to assist her speech with provoking volubility.

"Hello, Sissy; yes, the train will be in in about five minutes. Here is the paper. No, I couldn't come over last night. Mother told me you expected me. I am sorry I did not come. Don't be mad. Here is a box of chocolates."

All this time the poor girl was trying to speak but she could not, so Luke continued. "I know that you were all dressed up and cried and said a lot of mean things about me, no-no-don't speak—no-it is not because I don't like you, for I do, and I'll be a lucky boy if I ever get you, for you can't never be a scolding wife."

The poor girl grew from pink to red while she struggled to say:

"You-are-a-mean-and-cruel-man."

"Now, Sissy, you will choke to death some day if you don't stop trying to talk. I know what you mean—but, Sissy, I couldn't help it. I was sent 'way down to Harkness with some baggage—I didn't get back till eleven o'clock. Now, if you have anything to say sing it, for the train will be here before you can get it out—sing it."

Sissy took his advice and sang in a quavering little falsetto voice, "I'll never speak to you again, Luke, the brute of all the men," and then she sank down on the bench with her eyes filled with tears, but they suddenly dried as Luke brought several novels with lurid covers and tumbled them into her arms just as an automobile drew up at the platform back of the station. This created a little diversion and the smiles appeared again.

Mark Burton was the rich owner of the great flour mills at Logan, and also the owner of half the small town, as he had built many small houses which his workmen were obliged to rent of him, and besides these evidences of wealth he had a magnificent residence and was erecting a large modern office building with lodge rooms and offices above and stores below.

Claude Burton, his only son, had driven up noisily with his machine and then came through the station swaggering, in the most extreme costume for automobiling. He lifted the disfiguring goggles from his eyes, and lighted a cigarette from which he blew clouds of smoke, as he looked about him. The young man was about twenty-one, but his features were already drawn and showed the ravages of excessive smoking—perhaps also of drugs. His face was of a waxy yellow pallor, the skin looking dry and leathery. His cheeks which should have been rounded and bearing the glow of health were hollowed in. No one who met him for the first time would have believed him to be less than forty years old. And there was a general air of unwholesomeness about Claude that made a disagreeable impression upon the beholder. One would have said involuntarily "a cigarette fiend."

As he passed through the station to the platform he said carelessly: "Hello, Luke."

Luke replied: "Good morning, Mr. Burton, I see that you have a new choo-choo car."

"Yes," said Claude lightly, "the third one this year. This cost five thousand dollars."

"Whee! Your dad must have paid for it."

"Oh, I don't know, I guess I could manage to pay for it—and another if I get tired of this one," said Claude, lighting another cigarette languidly.

"Yes, you could!" answered Luke with an inflection expressive of disbelief in Claude's ability to pay.

"What?" said Claude angrily.

"Oh, I only said yes, you could," and this apology was accompanied by a sly wink at Sissy who was sitting there choosing which book to read first. Claude looked at her with studied carelessness, and taking the local paper began to scan it over as he said:

"Ah, the girl with the hesitating voice. How are you, Miss Slenderfish?"

"Oh, I'm all—" and there she paused with her mouth open, and with a miserable expression on her face. Claude took a box of candy from the counter and gave it to her. Luke was angry not only that Claude should dare give her candy, but that he should ridicule her speech. Luke loved Sissy honestly and unselfishly and permitted none other to say a word against her. Claude languidly lit another cigarette, throwing away a half smoked one, and as he paid for the candy he said:

"Oh, I say, Luke, marry her and take her away and put 'Logans' out of its misery."

Luke looked volumes at Claude, but the latter strolled away after giving Luke the money. Then he sauntered back, saying:

"See the show last night?"

Luke voiced his scorn of the play which he

had not seen, and finally added that the show had been attached, and he asked if Claude had heard of the disaster to the show.

"Yes," he replied, "I had heard of it and that is why I am here. I thought possibly they would be down on this train. By the way, isn't it behind time?"

"Oh, no," answered Luke carelessly, "because any old time does for this train. It is a go-as-you-please train. They've stopped up the road a piece to give Jim Sheridan a box that he sent for clear to New York. And, you needn't think they'll leave there till they've talked everything all over. Say, what do you want to see these actor folks for? Want to see how they look on the street without paint?"

"Oh, I know plenty of them—saw them in New York. They don't look any different from other folks. Got a match? They are really and truly human beings——"

"The pictures looked good," hazarded Luke tentatively. "Gold shoes and pink stockings, curling blonde hair. They say she looked just stunning. I sawed a picture of her—now, Sissy," as the poor girl opened her lips in an ineffectual effort to speak, "this ain't a girl's business—I only sawed the pictures——"

"Well, Luke," said Claude, drawing the station agent to one side, "if that girl whose picture you sawed, should happen to come through here on that train, if it ever gets here," he continued with scornful sarcasm, "I say, if that girl comes on

that train I want to know it. See? I'll pay you for your trouble, see?"

"She is as good as found, but, how much do I get if I do?"

"Oh, ah, fifty cents," said Claude carelessly, always puffing at his cigarette. Luke looked at Claude from his cap to his boots with unmitigated scorn as he replied:

"Is that all she is worth?"

"Oh I can remain here myself and that is all it is worth to tell me."

"Ah, say, listen," whispered Luke, mysteriously drawing close to Claude, "if you will promise not to tell I will let you into a secret, so you will know I know what I am talking about. I am a detective!"

"What?"

"Yes, I am, and here is my badge. See? I sent five dollars to New York and they sent me this badge and a book of rules how to catch a thief, and how to find a fugitive, and now I am a detective. I don't think fifty cents is enough to catch a fugitive."

"Why you triple-plated idiot! That is a bunco of the purest water. Every fool in the country—every fool in every Rube town does that and gets a certificate and a tin badge costing five cents and imagines—well, keep it a secret locked in your own breast. Don't tell any one or you'll lose your reputation for a man of sense. Only fools and hayseeds fall for that."

"Don't get too fresh, Claude Burton, I used to lick you in school. It might be that I could do

it yet. I don't think baggage rustling so bad for the muscles as cigarette dope. I tell you I am a detective," said Luke wrathfully.

"What can you detect in this place anyway—nothing ever happens here," sneered Claude.

"Well, maybe there didn't use to, but for the last three months checks and money have been missed from the post office, so now!"

"How do you know that?" asked Claude, turning a shade whiter.

"Every fool in town knows it. It is a wonder that you should have been left in ignorance," rejoined Luke still smarting under Claude's scorn of his pretensions. "It is strange that you did not know it."

"What do you mean?" asked Claude, trembling visibly.

"Oh, nothing, a very little thing, I only shoot at me che-ild. It is only that it is your father's mail that has been robbed at Meredith's store."

"Who gave you all this information?" queried Claude with an assumption of dignity which set illy upon his withered face.

"Jake Bender," replied Luke grandly. "He and I are working on the case together and we make a strong team."

"In that case the thief may rest in peace for—well, who does the great Bender, the Logan's Corners Sherlock Holmes suspect?"

"Well, they do say that old man Meredith has been losing money hand over fist by trusting folks too much, and, well, it points that way. I don't think he is dishonest, but you never can tell——"

"Betty's father," muttered Claude to himself, and then under cover of lighting another cigarette he continued in that train of thought. It does look that way to one—who knows nothing. I wonder if she would come back if she knew? I'd like to get that girl. I said I would four years ago when she left."

At this juncture the sound of a moving train was heard, and in another moment the ponderous engine had thundered by, stopped and appeared to tremble, throb and pant from the exertion.

A few passengers for Logan's Corners, and nearby farms got out. An omnibus stood by the outside of the platform to take passengers to Logan's Corners, two miles away, as there was no other means of reaching that small town.

There was the usual bustle, but in a few minutes all was quiet again. Sissy was deep in one of the books, and was nibbling at her candy with ineffable delight. Her idea of perfect felicity was a book to read and candy to nibble between times.

The mail pouch had been carelessly tossed to the platform where it lay unattended and almost unnoticed.

Among the passengers who had alighted from the train was a stranger in the place, where every one knew every one else, at least by sight. This stranger was a man of possibly thirty years, possibly a trifle less, but he had an air of being somewhat of an invalid. He stooped perceptibly and from time to time he coughed slightly. He was not emaciated, and looked as though in good phy-

sical condition, yet his coat hung loosely upon him, and in some intangible way he gave the impression that he was by no means as strong as he looked. He was handsome, and had the unmistakable air of a man accustomed to city life.

Luke in one swift glance had decided that the newcomer was what was called in that locality "a lunger," meaning a man whose lungs were weak and who required the bracing healthy air of Logan's Corners.

The stranger had sat about so long that the omnibus for Logan's had gone, and he looked uneasy as well as undecided. Every few minutes he glanced at the neglected mail pouch which lay just as it had fallen upon the platform.

The stranger asked several questions of Luke about the place and the probable accommodations he would find there, and kept his conversation up until Claude returned from making an admiring inspection of his great automobile which stood like a sleeping giant at the back of the station. Sissy was absolutely oblivious of everything at the station, as her thoughts were bounded by the book she was reading, but she looked very pretty as she furtively wiped away the tears that gathered, over the woes of the beautiful heroine.

CHAPTER II

BROTHERLY AMENITIES

While the stranger sat looking about him with apparent interest, Claude had returned, and his stained fingers and unhealthy pallor at once attracted the stranger's attention, but before anything could be done or said the elder Burton, Claude's father, came striding along the platform with quick, nervous steps, making that structure tremble as his heels struck the planks.

Claude tried to avoid his father, but ineffectually, for the elder man came directly to him and said sternly:

"Young man, come here. I have something to say to you."

"Yes, father," answered Claude, lighting another cigarette to "save his face" as the Chinese call it, for he was undeniably afraid of his father's anger, and he had the faculty of keeping that at white heat the most of the time. He had just purchased a new automobile, simply because some one had spoken of the latest one he had as a "last year's model and all out of date." And he had done many other things which he had good reason to fear his father would not accept, so more than one questioning thought rushed through his nicotized brain as he finally faced his father.

It was certainly a bitter disappointment to a man so active and so clever and capable in business to have this son on whom he had once set his hopes turn out to be so useless and so perverse. Mr. Burton had hoped fondly that Claude would be his right hand in his rapidly growing business, but not only had the boy no business ability whatever but he had many vicious habits, and now his brain was so seeped in the poison that he was anything but a son to be proud of. Claude affected to be ashamed that his father still went to business at the mills daily. He had gone about with a fast set while in college, and his general conduct was so bad that finally he was turned out of college and now was home eating up his father's hard earned money, and not only that but draining his mother and sister of all theirs. He was bad and vicious all the way through. With a city man's acumen the stranger had already judged him, and looked upon him as one of the young men who pride themselves upon their degeneracy. Mr. Burton after looking his son over from head to foot spoke:

"Why was it that you did not get in till two o'clock this morning? And why was it that you left before seeing us at breakfast?"

"Oh, well, I am old enough to take care of myself after dark, and this morning I wished to get out early to try my new machine," replied Claude, glibly, and with a certain degree of insolence, yet not daring to look his father in the eyes, for at heart Claude was a coward, and Mr.

Burton was not to be trifled with when he was as angry as he now appeared to be.

And, angry he was with a hot and despairing shame that his only son should be such a worthless cigarette fiend, as he often termed it. His own life had been one of unremitting toil and industry, coupled with an unshakeable determination to succeed. If many persons found fault with some of his methods of dealing with his operatives, he had nevertheless made a success of the industry which he had founded.

Mr. Burton stood there still a handsome man, his strong face clean shaven, and with clear cut features. His slightly florid color was offset by his thick and curling white hair, while his dark eyes and darker eyebrows lent strength and character which his fine teeth showing in a rare smile redeemed from hardness. His shoulders were square and he carried himself well, looking even younger than his son.

As Claude had given his rather lame excuse, his father's dark eyes blazed:

"Why don't you tell the truth and say that you were hanging around that theater company—and that you are here to see them take the train for New York."

"What is the use trying to deny it when you are so set on believing it?" answered Claude insolently. "I am wise enough not to dispute with you."

"Well," said the father triumphantly, "they are not on the train. Those of them who did not escape are held for their board bills in town. So

you have no occasion to remain here to gratify a useless curiosity about such outcasts."

"I am not worrying myself about them at all. I was out of cigarettes and—er—ah—any new developments in that post office affair?" asked Claude, hoping thus to change the current of his father's thoughts.

"Nothing, only that I wrote to Washington last week, and made a full statement of my losses in checks and money at our local post office and suggested that the matter be investigated. It is not very pleasant to feel that your letters are tampered with under any circumstances, but, it becomes rather wearing when one is robbed systematically as I have been——"

"Did you, ah—suggest that the present post-master would bear investigation?" asked Claude while his fingers clenched and unclenched in his pocket.

"No, I did not, and I am by no means sure that he knows anything about it, but he is old and not capable of handling the largely increased business that my factory has brought to Logan's Corners. He is too old—he is meddlesome."

This last observation had been made in a low voice as though it were more thought than pronounced.

"Why do they keep such old fogies in office anyway? Why don't they get a young man who is up to date and would keep abreast of the times?" queried Claude.

"Oh, he was an old soldier. He was in the war with McKinley years ago, and it was owing

to his having specially recommended this man, Meredith, that the Government pensioned him off in this way to the injury of the people here," replied Burton with acumen.

"Why, I thought the Government paid pensions to old soldiers wounded in the war. I think the time is past for such sentimental feelings. *We* pay taxes for just such things."

The father laughed bitterly and remarked dryly:

"I like that! *We* pay taxes. You mean *I* pay taxes. *You* don't even pay taxes on your beastly bull dogs."

"Oh, I say! Go light, Governor, go light! I've got time."

"Hum, will you have time to take me up to the mills in your new machine—that I paid for—when I come out? I've got some business to attend to that cannot be delayed."

"Yes, Governor," answered Claude conciliatingly, for he did not wish to offend his father beyond the limits of his endurance. But, as soon as his father was out of earshot he muttered:

"Now, that's a *fine* of a way for a father to treat his only son. He ought to be proud of having a gentleman in the family."

During this time the stranger sat upon a bench designed to accommodate waiting passengers, as though he scarcely knew what to do, but he appeared to admire the view up the valley which was indeed one to attract a lover of calm country landscape. But while he had every outward appearance of being absorbed in thought, a latent

fire in the depths of his eyes proved that he had not missed seeing a movement or hearing a word that passed between father and son.

Scarcely had Mr. Burton gone into the telegraph office when Maude Burton, Claude's only sister, came tripping up to him. She was taller than Claude and had every appearance of perfect health, in direct contrast to his miserable pallor and lined features. She would have been considered beautiful had it not been for an air of haughty, supercilious pride, mingled with a bitter discontent with life in such an obscure place in the world as Logan's Corners. True she lived in a beautiful home, dressed elegantly in the latest New York style, but in her eyes nothing could offset the fact that this was what was called "A small town" and her very soul hated the narrow life and longed for triumphs in a sphere more worthy of her attractions.

Maude really loved her father even while she despised him for being so wrapped up in his business, and for being willing to live in this place instead of some great city. She had a sort of patronizing affection for her invalid mother, but she loved her graceless brother with the almost brooding affection and tenderness of a mother for a wild boy. He responded to her sisterly affection by bullying, begging and borrowing from her, until half the time she was penniless in spite of the liberal allowance her father made her.

Claude now received her with an expression of intense annoyance but she paid no attention to

this belligerent attitude—she was used to it—and went to him, and passing her arm around his neck affectionately said sweetly:

“Hello, brother dear.”

“Oh, cut it out! What do you want now?” was the ungracious reply as he writhed loose from her hand, ostensibly to light another cigarette.

“What makes you think I want something?” she asked very sweetly, at the same time casting her eyes with lively curiosity at the stranger sitting there. She had instantly noticed the unmistakable air of refinement. Claude turned a sour visage toward his sister, replying to her question.

“Why, the last time you called me ‘brother dear’ you added that I was a dope fiend.”

“Oh, never mind that. It was only in fun, or else I was vexed at something, and you know we often say things when vexed that we don’t really mean. I apologize. Give me a ride in the new machine. I am awfully tired of the pony and cart. It is all out of style now.”

“You were pleased enough when you got it, and I notice you never asked me to ride with you.”

“Yes, and that old Pope-Toledo was good enough for you until you got the new Packard. Times change.”

“Oh, I say! Stow it! Cut it out! I’ve just had one dose from the Governor and that’s enough for one day. I’m tired of your preaching!”

"Now, brother, don't be cross, but take me for a ride. Come on, do. I want to be the first woman to ride in it with you."

"No, my darling, sweet tempered sister, I'll see you—ahem! first."

"Oh, Claude," said the girl with actual tears in her eyes, tears of rage, vexation and disappointment. But she put her arm around his neck and tried to kiss him, while he rudely turned away, while Maude whispered in his ear, "I am sorry. But, tell me who is that stranger sitting over there. He doesn't look like any of the natives in this Rube town."

"Well, I'll be darned! You are the limit! Want an introduction?"

"I certainly do," replied Maude, still fixing her eyes upon the handsome stranger, who noticing that he was an object of curiosity coughed several times, placing his shapely hands upon his breast each time. Maude continued:

"He looks like he might be from the city, and oh, I am so tired of these common country folks that surely we, being the only family of consequence in the place, might waive ceremony a little. I do wish father would move away from here, this dry old town, and to the city. He could put some one in charge of the factory. Other people do that. I want to meet some real people."

"We do agree upon one thing, sure," replied Claude guardedly.

"I am glad you admit it. Let's celebrate."

"How?"

"Why, invite me for a ride, and introduce your friend."

"Now, who wants to ride with his own sister? And, I don't know the stranger. He looks like a 'lunger' to me, up here for the high air. Well, he's here to-day and will be gone to-morrow, so I'll scrape acquaintance to please you. It may serve to pass the time."

Saying this a little more graciously, Claude left his sister and advanced to where the stranger sat, bowing and speaking with a politeness quite unusual to him:

"I beg your pardon, but you seem to be a stranger here. Is there anything I can do for you? Did you miss the 'bus?"

"Yes," replied the stranger, rising and bowing both to Claude and his sister, as without having wished to do so, he had heard the most of this conversation. "I was not quick enough and all the seats were taken. I've been thinking that that medieval conveyance might be back, so I waited. My time is likely to hang heavy on my hands and so I take things as easy as circumstances will permit. Could you tell me anything about the place called Logan's Corners?"

During this short conversation Maude had drawn near and as he paused she replied in her sweetest voice:

"It isn't much——"

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger bowing low to Maude, and taking a visiting card from his pocket. "If I may, I will present myself. My name, as you see, is Logan, and it seemed to

me that this might be a good place for me. I want to live out of doors all I can. Do you think it would be good for my trouble?" he continued, looking at Maude, who flushed prettily as she replied:

"It is high and dry, and I think the air is fine. The mountains beyond are covered with pine, fir and spruce, and there is a stream that comes from away up in the clouds, it would seem, it is so pure and cold."

Claude now took matters into his own hands by saying:

"Mr. Logan, allow me to present my sister, Miss Burton, and myself. My name is Claude. My father owns the mills and about everything else around here," and Claude threw out his chest with a grand air.

"I am delighted to meet you both, Mr. Burton. I had not expected such ah—a—refined—people in such a small town as Logan's Corners is said to be. It is more than kind of you to welcome a stranger like this."

"I know brother would be glad to take you to the hotel. He was just going to take me for a spin. Come on and get in," said Maude airily, sure that her brother could not now refuse her, yet with a sidelong glance at him for he was always what one might call an uncertain quantity. But this time pride in his new machine predominated and he said grandly:

"Yes, and it cost five thousand dollars."

"I thank you very much," said Logan, with an

air of finality, "but I have ordered a conveyance and promised the driver that I would wait."

Logan had heard the warm argument between brother and sister and had had a couple of coughing spells to hide his amusement at the girl's cleverness in catching her brother thus off his guard.

Just then Mr. Burton stepped briskly up to the little group, without having noticed that there was any one there besides his two children, and said shortly:

"Come on, Claude. Take me over to the mills. Ah, Maude, are you going along?"

"No, father, I am waiting for the train—the New York Express. I expect a friend."

Claude's dull eyes sparkled for an instant as he muttered:

"Ahem! But she is a beautiful liar! It comes perfectly natural to her as a special gift. She is struck on this stranger with the yellow complexion, and she will land him if he doesn't skip out soon."

"Come on, Claude, I am in a hurry," said the father, whereat the dutiful son muttered: "Ah, you are always in a hurry. But, for once you shall go as fast as you like. We won't touch ground more than once getting there." So they left Maude and the stranger standing there while Claude lit another cigarette and started for the powerful machine. Maude, with her prettiest smile, and she was pretty when she allowed her discontented and haughty expression to fade from her face, said:

"I am afraid you will find this place rather dull."

"Oh, I don't think so—you live here," and this statement was supported by a sweeping bow which was as nectar to a thirsty soul. "Every one seems hospitable, and here are books—and periodicals—plenty of them."

At this assertion Luke pricked up his ears and decided to get out his full assortment for the stranger to see while Maude said:

"Yes, but ours is the only family where a gentleman like you could care to associate. We are really the only society people in this county."

"Indeed! Is that so?" said Logan.

"Why, yes; all the rest are what we call natives, and they are all working people."

"Farmers, I suppose?"

"No, brother calls them Rubes, and most of them work in father's mills."

"Oh, I see. And your post office, how far is that from this place?"

"About two miles, at Logan's Corners—in Meredith's grocery. Are you expecting to have your mail sent here?"

"Yes, as I expect to remain some time. And, I am anxious to get it."

"Well, Mr. Logan, if you don't mind, I advise you not to send or receive any mail—at any rate any valuable letters through our post office here."

"May I ask why, Miss Burton?"

"Well, father says to keep it quiet, but you are a stranger and I think you should know," continued she, but hesitating at last.

"I am greatly interested and thank you for telling me."

"Checks, drafts and money orders have been missing for two months, and the postmaster is under suspicion."

"I am greatly obliged to you, I assure you, and thank you, and I will be careful, but a post office thief would care very little for my letters. They are from a lady and I get one every day."

"Oh, I see," said Maude, speaking with dry lips.

"Will you excuse me a moment?" said Logan, "I will be right back," and he went rapidly through the station to the back door and looked about a second and then returned to her saying: "I wished to see if my conveyance is in sight. I am afraid that driver has forgotten me. I will telephone him if there is one near."

While he was saying these words in the most banal tone, Maude muttered to herself: "My hopes are shattered again. The first real possibility, and he gets a letter every day and writes as often. Father must really arrange for me to go to the city. Yes," she continued aloud, "yes, there is a booth in the station. I will show you."

They then entered the little station just as the clock struck the hour.

CHAPTER III

BETTY'S TRIBULATIONS

The father and son left the place and Maude and Logan disappeared in the small station in quest of the telephone booth, while Luke and Sissy sauntered off, leaving the place deserted. The stillness of the morning again settled down over the peaceful scene, and no one was in sight. This pleasant quiet lasted only a short time, as the sound of a baggage truck rumbling along broke upon the stillness with a decidedly unpleasant effect. The truck was propelled by a man whose sad and lugubrious expression had become habitual, so that in mockery all the town people called him "happy Charlie." He groaned as he pushed the truck, which sank into the gravelled walk every few steps. There was another man with him, but he offered no assistance other than constant grumbling at Charlie's ineffectual efforts to propel the laden truck without danger to the load. The second man was no less a personage than Jade Bender, the town constable, a man with an overwhelming sense of his own importance. He wore a rusty black frock coat with a large badge conspicuously exhibited on the lapel. His face was thin and folded into thousands of

small wrinkles. Beneath his chin he had a thin and scraggy beard which he thought made him resemble the late and great Horace Greeley, his particular hero. He possessed several copies of the *Tribune* of the days when Greeley was its redoubtable editor, and he knew those fiery editorials by heart, and repeated them whenever he could get any one to listen.

Bender walked ponderously to the platform and sat down as though he had done something beyond the ordinary in the line of upholding the majesty of the law, while Charlie came puffing up at last with the truck, stopped and wiped his brow with an enormous red handkerchief.

"Where d'ye want 'em, Constable?" he asked.

The freight on this truck was a curious one, and one that would have attracted the loungers had they known of it in time to gather, for, in addition to a mail pouch which was carelessly thrown to the platform, there was a small bit of theatrical scenery representing a jail, with three figures such as are used by professional ventriloquists.

They represented the usual old man, old woman and Irishman. They looked garish and even horrible in the clear light of the day. The unceremonious moving about had broken the movable jaw of the old man and the lower part hung down in a distressful manner. The three had been piled pellmell on the truck, with a trunk or two. Charlie sat down on the edge of the truck and said sadly:

"This seems to be your busy day, Constable."

"Yes, it is, and I expect will be all day," replied Bender, getting up and strutting about, flourishing his billy, and looking down at his badge to be sure it was bright. "Busy? I should cut a melon! I'll show these show folks with their operars that us country folks ain't so durned hayseeded as they think. I got their baggage and I'm going to put them in my barn till they settle their bill at the hotel yonder."

"They'll stay there till they dry rot. No opera ever gets money whenst they've once busted. Did you get all the performers?"

"No, darn cuss 'em! Two of 'em got away, but I got their trunks and I'll find 'em. They've got paint all over their faces and all their stage tog-gery on, and I've telephoned all the villages to look out for them and arrest them on sight. They'll find out that Jade Bender never lets a criminal escape." And this last sentence was accompanied by a grand and forceful look, which might have struck terror into the hearts of the fugitives had they seen it.

"Wall," moaned Charlie, "I hope you do for the sake of the good name of the township. Such rascals should be put where the dogs can't bite 'em, but I got a feelin' that you won't get 'em."

"Ah-h, do you want to see 'em get away, that you try to put a hoodoo on the business? Why should you have such a fool feeling? You always look on the black side of things," said Bender angrily, for this had been and still was his own private opinion which he had been trying to bolster up by braggadocio. He feared what

he did not understand, and to him all things concerning theaters and operas were as a sealed book, besides hadn't he heard how the theater folks had a habit of appearing and disappearing right before your eyes? He had heard of such things from those who had gone to the big cities and seen the wonders there.

"Wall, nothing but bad things comes my way," answered Charlie.

"You're a regular *pesserist*, and, as I appointed you deputy constable, you quit it or I'll unappoint you, now then."

"What was that you just called me?" asked Charlie as though undecided as to whether he should weep from wounded feelings or fight because of the insult, but Jade calmed him by explaining that the obnoxious word was only to signify that Charley was one of those men whose Ishmaelitish hand was against everything and everything was against him.

"Wall, that's all right then, but I thought it was something bad. Oh, I say! What you selling?" he added, as he noticed the fact that Jade was unfolding a printed notice whose large type meant that "he who runs, may read."

"Why," returned Bender, "I'm advertising old man Meredith's stock of groceries. He owes three hundred and fifty dollars, and it's a judgment agin' him. If he don't pay in thirty days I'll sell him out, cheese and crackers. That's what."

"Wa-all, I guess he'll be sold out all right. Nobody in this world has got that much money

'cept old man Burton," answered Charlie pessimistically.

"Yes, and he would see Meredith in his grave before he'd let him have it. He hates old man Meredith like pizon, 'cause he gave groceries to the workmen when they was on strike at the mill, or they couldn't have held out."

"I was sure they'd lose that strike," moaned Charlie.

"And they would have only for old man Meredith. He fed and trusted 'em so they could hold out and Burton had to give in and pay what they asked."

"And now he wants to get the old man out of the post office because he had a heart for other's woes. It is a sad world, Constable."

"Well, he is old and it would be the best thing—to get a younger man—more like——"

"You, perhaps, but you see he's got a letter from McKinley, and that seems to make him strong."

"Oh, that's years ago now, and McKinley's dead, and it ain't no pull no more. We've got a new president now."

"The 1st we have? Who is it?"

"Why Roosevelt."

"Oh, yes, I forgot, but he won't be there for long, and I've got a feelin' old man Meredith'll lose that letter and then it'll be all up with him."

"You see, since that gal of his, Betty, left him for that choir in New York, old Meredith seems to have lost his grip. It is a pity she couldn't have known that she dragon of a stepmother of

hers was going to die suddenly. You see," said Bender, sitting down comfortably, while Charlie with great interest listened to him, "the fact is that Meredith never ought to have married that woman. (Here Charlie groaned dismally.) She was the widder of an old comrade and she just set out to get him and she did it, and before he fairly knew it she had captured him. The poor little girl was kinder needin' a mother since her own had died, and perhaps he done it for her sake, who knows, but he suffered for it anyhow, for almost as soon as he was tied she let out her real disposition and abused that gal something fierce.

"Yes, she was always a pretty little thing with curly hair—the brightest, sparklingest little thing you ever knew. She was all sunshine and breeze and pretty as they ever see, and she just worshiped her father, and was so proud of his record as a soldier—why that gal could give points to them that makes histories before she could spell her own name. Now I liked the kid, and felt darned sorry when she fell into that woman's cat claws. She just sot down and made that mite do all the work, and go to school too, and never gave her a minute's peace nor comfort. And Betty, she managed somehow to pick up notes and learn to sing and by jinks she could out-sing the very birds on the trees. She sung in the church, and whenever they was a church entertainment she was called' on to sing and she done it so well that she had offers to go out with an opera company that came here twict. But her

father couldn't bear to part with her. But at last that woman she got to beating Betty, who was always a high-spirited little thing, and she didn't want to make no trouble between her pa and her stepmother, so she just naturally ran away, to New York, and soon had a good place singing in a church choir, and boarding with the deacon's wife. Then somehow they lost trace of her, and couldn't let her know that her stepmother was dead and she was needed to home. I always liked the bright little thing and my wife she is a great reader, and she said it was like a book called 'Breaking a Butterfly' or something like that. Anyway, it was a sorry day for Meredith when she went. He don't seem to have no get-up, just like a weak fool, and he trusts every one—every old beat that comes along, and now he is busted. But my duty is duty."

The constable told what he knew of the fortunes of the little Betty he had known, and as there is more that is unknown to the reader perhaps it would be well to tell it here, as it has a direct interest. Betty, as she was called by all who knew her, had toiled for one year in the Burton mills, and it was at this time that her stepmother had been the most abusive. Betty was clever enough to realize that she would have no chance in this small town, hampered by her father's lack of business acumen, and so determined after an unusually severe beating at the hands of this virago to go to the city and try there to make her way and leave her poor father free from the constant unhappiness of knowing her ill-treated,

though he never knew the full extent of her sufferings.

Betty had taken her small savings and reached New York, where her brightness, her dancing and above all her singing soon obtained an engagement for her in one of the cheaper vaudeville houses. She was far-sighted enough to realize that her voice would soon be destroyed by the style of singing in vogue here, and so gave more attention to dancing, sparing her really exquisite voice and studying, hoping for a better position later. Naturally a sweet and innocent girl from the country had many temptations, but she always held to her pride as a soldier's daughter. Her father was her hero and her only love, and so she had a rock of safety to hold to which kept her above all trouble and trials such as beset the pretty young girls who are before the public.

The company she was with traveled about the country and she learned much, and quietly understudied the star of the troupe unknown to any one. One day there was consternation among this company, for the star was very ill and they were unable to continue without her. This was Betty's opportunity and she suddenly became the star prima donna of what is popularly called a "ten-twenty-thirty" show. Although this was a cheap and small affair, it gave her confidence and she learned many new things while doing her dancing turn as well as singing. She was a favorite wherever she was, for she was so dainty that everything, every step and gesture gained something distinctive and individual from her

own personality. She gained in stage experience while still maintaining her own individuality. The company was bound together by a community of interests, and it would be a daring man who would offer an affront to their Betty, for all felt that she was of them and their family. They were united in ties of steel, formed by suffering, of toil, and of companionship. Betty was safe among these people whom certain rigid church members consider men of Belial.

Everything had gone well with the company with few inevitable ups and downs, until the disaster that had fallen upon them in this small place not over five or six miles from where Betty had been born.

Had everything gone well with them Betty had intended to go see her father when they should reach Logan's, but now she would rather have suffered anything than make such a dismal entry. Like most children she did not realize that a child can never wear out the patience of a loving father. He had never ceased to mourn the absence of this dear child, but he could not let her know all that had passed, not knowing where she was.

So it had happened that the constable had attached the baggage and caught the other members of the company, but Sammy, the comedian, and Betty, the prima donna and dancer, had managed to escape his hands, but clad in their stage costumes and make-up. They had hurried to the station, found an empty baggage car and entered it with the hope that they might reach

New York where Sammy, a good fellow and like a brother to Betty, would surely be able to find an engagement. Betty was put inside the car while Sammy laid himself down on the roof, and so the car was pulled out late that night and when it stopped it was on the siding at Logan's Corners. Betty looked through the crevices of the door and with a sinking heart she recognized her own old home, but she felt that she would rather die than let her stepmother know the truth.

Sammy had aroused her, whereat she asked if they were in New York, but all he knew was that they were anchored in some small town on a siding near the depot, and no more.

It was at this instant that the constable had said that Meredith trusted every old beat. Charlie gave a hollow groan as he said this, saying that he owed Meredith forty-two dollars and feared that he would not make money enough this year to pay the debt. And it was just then that Sammy looked down from his high perch on the car and said:

"Oh, pipe the chief of police with my children. They are pinched. Papa's talking figures in the hands of the law, and Betty's trunk and mine—well, babies, you must be rescued. How is my voice this morning?"

Saying this Sammy cleared his throat and "threw his voice," saying "I say, you, Constable."

Jade and Charlie looked all about to see who had spoken, but there was no one in sight, and finally Jade looked at the figures which were piled so unceremoniously on the truck.

"Did they speak?" asked Charlie, in an awed voice.

"Boo, how could they? They are *inhuman*."

"I think they called you."

"It sounded over there."

"I say, you, Constable, you with the lemon face," said Sammy.

"Yes, they are really calling you," said Charlie, turning pale.

"And the other man with the hatchet face," continued the voice from the clouds. The constable then said with a note of triumph:

"You see, he called you."

"Go on, you fraud, what do you want, anyhow?" said Charlie.

"You are wanted down in the yards. Tramps breaking into the freight cars. Hurry, not that way, this way. Not that way, you fool, the other way, hurry, hurry, murder, police!"

By this time the constable and Charlie were so rattled that they, in trying to obey the unseen person, fairly tumbled over each other trying to hurry fast enough, while Sammy up above grinned with satisfaction, and, he added:

"Art is art every time. I can work on or off the stage, but the worst thing about it is that you can't eat art," and saying this he crept down from his airy position on the top of the freight car and to his mannikins. He looked considerably the worse for his long night in the open air, for his coat was wrinkled and his necktie mussed, while his hair was straggling about his face in a very dishevelled state. And, if the ruling pas-

sion is strong in death the passion of an actor is strong enough to cause him to run great risks to display it, if even to himself. Sammy walked to his figures and taking them to his breast, talked to them in loving tones.

"Papa's babies under arrest, the poor dear little things! Now, don't cry so hard, you poor boys. And you, Sally, up all night with two men! Oh, oh, you will lose your reputation!"

And, in the face of danger and difficulty, hunger, and the fact that he had not one penny to bless himself with, Sammy continued and put his two wooden figures through their usual conversation. That the three were not made to talk, sing and quarrel was because the old man had had the accident aforesaid to his lower jaw. After he had put them through their regular morning rehearsal he placed them all in the trunk that was their nightly lodging, but into which he had had no chance to place them in consequence of his hurried departure. After they were safely bestowed, and while the constable and Charlie were searching the yards beyond conscientiously, Sammy went to the freight car and knocked softly on the door.

"Betty, Betty! Are you dead?"

"Oh!" came from a silvery voice inside the car:

"Is this the first or last call for breakfast?" and, following the voice, came into view Betty Meredith.

CHAPTER IV

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN INTO THE FIRE.

As the door slid back under Sammy's skillful manipulations a pretty head crowned with a profusion of curls, long and blonde, with a glittering golden crown upon it, showed in the depths of the car as though the owner of the head had a reason for not coming farther forward. Beside her could be distinguished a bass drum and a small trunk and a large horn which gleamed like gold against the background of the car. Sammy reached out to assist Betty to descend, but again she drew back, as she asked if this was the first or last call for breakfast. Sammy said sadly:

"Yes, fair but faded queen, it is if we can find any."

"Oh dear!" said Betty, "it is going to thunder. It looks like a storm. How near are we to New York?"

"One hundred miles, just ten miles from where we were last night."

"That is too bad, but how we did run from that constable last night." Betty knew well where she was but she did not wish Sammy to know, so she kept up the sorry joke as the best thing to do, and when he asked if the family

jewels were safe, she replied that she forgot them on the fire escape of the hotel, but that, she added, could not compare with her distress over the fact that she had lost her street wardrobe and now must remain in seclusion.

"Oh," said Sammy, "it is terrible about those jewels, for I stole that thirty thousand dollars' worth of jewels every night in the play and got five years in prison each time, so that I have a sort of affection for them," and he pretended to weep.

"Never mind, Sammy, the first fifty cents I get I will buy new ones at Macy's. Take the elevator and come up. I have an alcohol stove up here and if I had something to cook I would serve breakfast. I thought you said this Pullman went to New York."

Sammy mounted to the floor of the car and sat in the open door, saying: "Well, it said 'fast freight,' but it didn't say how fast."

"I am sorry we did not get away from here for many reasons," said Betty seriously, "and I must get away as soon as possible."

"This might be a good burg for vaudeville moving pictures, 12 shows a day and twelve dollars a week for the team," remarked Sammy bitterly.

"Sammy, I must tell the truth. I am afraid it is too near my home. I must get out, that's sure."

"I suppose you are a millionaire's daughter, and ran away from home. Betty, you always was a regular puzzle to me."

"Sammy, you haven't got the drama right.

I've got a poor old daddy that lives here some place, and that three hundred and fifty that I loaned to the manager I had saved to send to him. I did run away. I have a stepmother and she don't like me, and, well—there wasn't any love lost. I went to New York to go on the stage. I didn't get on very well—you know why—because I wasn't that kind of a girl.

"I heard daddy's wife died, but am not sure she did—and I might have come back, but I just couldn't and I wanted to make my way in the world, and become famous. You know how a girl wants to be somebody great. It was hard and I went hungry sometimes—then I joined this little company and learned a lot, and wanted to be something more and better, and a great star but—now—see me."

"But you did make good, Betty. You are the best singing and dancing soubrette in America, and if you ever get a chance in a good company in New York you'd be a star and make some of them now posing sit up and take notice."

"All the folks in my town think I am singing in a church choir. You know, Sam, they don't know or understand our world. They think that all of us that put on tights and paint ain't respectable."

"Well, by the living—ahem! You are, Betty, and any one that knows you, Betty, would swear to that. If all the grand dames that go to church every Sunday and pretended to pray was half as true and good as you are the world would be a

better place to live in. Any one of us would go to h——for you."

"Sam——"

"I know it, and I didn't mean to swear, but you have been so straight and square in spite of many chances to go crooked that it stirs me all up to think anybody would dare—— Excuse me, queen."

"Well, I didn't intend to have any heart interest and tears, but you see it is near my home, and these trees and pure air bring it all back. I played about here in my bare feet and fished in those little ponds, all happy and free, and now we are busted and my hopes are all gone. I guess it's behind a dry goods counter for mine," and a few tears that she could not repress started hot from the pretty eyes.

"And it will be the street cars for mine, I guess. I *can* conduct."

"And, what hurts me most is that little fortune of mine, the three hundred and fifty dollars. I wanted to come back and hand that to my daddy. He is mighty proud of me—and he is a fine man, and an old soldier, a G. A. R. man, and he is the postmaster of the town. I tell you he is awfully well thought of. You know, Sammy, I come from mighty good folks. Why my father has a letter from McKinley—they went to war together."

"You sure are somebody, and I'm glad to know it, and I'm glad, Betty, that you always liked me. I tried to be decent when you was around——"

"And you have. You never said or did a

single thing that wasn't right, and you never got fresh like the rest. You've been a good pal, and a good big brother—and whatever happens I'll never forget it."

"Oh, I don't deserve no credit for that, for I somehow always felt like it was laid on me to treat you right and see that the others done the same. Betty, I'd lick h—I, I mean seven saucepans, out of any guy that ever dares—says—tries—you know, and we are good pals, but, oh, Lord, we are in a bad box just now!"

"Now," said Betty, with a delicious little assumption of dignity, "let's change the subject. I've got a fire in the range and we are only waiting for the marketing to be done. Oh, Sammy, I hear a hen crowing. Sammy, hearest thou the call of the fowl?"

"Me dost," he answered, striking an attitude.

"Thinkest thou that noise is a declaration that the fowl has accomplished something?"

"In what way, fair queen?"

"Oh, you dummy, any one would know that you were never in the country before. Eggs, Sammy, eggs!"

"Aha, aha! A light dawneth upon my thick skull. I will bring them."

"Wait, Antonio, should the fowl object, and I think she is to be discovered in yon edifice called a chicken coop, bring her also. Fried fowl would go well with eggs."

"Yes, and should I meet with a friendly and kindly disposed lady cow, what shall I do? What is the best way to address her?"

To this Betty replied by handing out a small tin pail which was in the car, and Sammy started off bravely, to return in a few moments in a state of joyous excitement. He whispered, fearing to speak, for he knew not whether any one was within hearing distance.

"Betty, Betty, good news, good news for you!"

"Well, spring it easy. I've got heart trouble. My days! It has been so long since I had good news that I could eat it."

"Our trunks are here—and——" At this Betty literally fell out of the car, but he caught her, saying: "but they are in the hands of the constable."

Poor Betty stiffened out with her disappointment, saying:

"I told you about my heart."

"Sh-h sh-sh," said Sammy.

"Ah, here comes the villain," said Betty, suddenly, while Sammy said hurriedly: "We've got to work quick. The tin star has been sent on an errand and will soon return."

"My trunk, my trunk, a pair of pink tights for a dress!" And it was no wonder that the poor child made this heart rending declaration as she stood here dressed in the abbreviated costume which she wore to dance in while on the stage. The tiny gold shoes were in evidence, and so were the pink stockings and the short, and dainty dress with its lacy underskirt, all suitable for the business but sadly out of place here and now.

"Quick, give us a hand," said Sammy, and together they drew a drummer's trunk from the

baggage car and put it on the truck, dragging Betty's trunk to the car and hoisting it inside. But before the two could get out of sight Luke and Sissy came back, Luke having a bunch of tags in his hand. Their escape was cut off, and Betty whispered despairingly:

"We are discovered, for here comes the station master with a lot of women."

But Sammy was a man of resources, and he put his hand in his pocket, saying: "Be a dummy!" and Betty, quick to understand his plan, hastily took her seat on the truck in an attitude which would cause anyone to suppose she was a "dummy" figure. Sammy had applied a fine moustache to his shaven face, and he took the paper which Luke had been reading and sat down on the trunk, belonging to the drummer, after having ostentatiously looked at a time table.

"Here, Sissy, look here. This is what is left of the troupe."

"Say, boy," said Sammy, in his most commanding tones, "check this trunk. I've sold every store in this city and I'm off for little old New York."

"Is this your trunk?" asked Luke casually, all the time looking hard at the supposed figure on the truck.

"Sure, there's my name on it."

"What do you sell?" asked Luke, with the familiarity and curiosity of the country station agent—newsboy—and many other things.

"Boots, shoes and eggs."

At this Betty could not restrain a guilty little

giggle which so surprised Luke that he dropped his strap of baggage tags with a clatter, saying at the same time:

"Say, Sissy, them dummies can talk. That one did, didn't it?"

"No-o," replied Sammy carelessly. "It was only the heavy breathing of your wife."

"Ah, go on, she ain't my wife—yet. I am the custodeen of these here things and I'm going to watch them," said Luke with determination in his eye. He intended to do his duty and not flinch.

"Oh, Lord, oh, Lord!" muttered Betty.

"What's that? What's that?" asked Luke, surprised.

"I say I'm bored. That's what," said Sammy with a sidelong glance at the unfortunate Betty.

"Wall," drawled Luke, "that's just what they didn't do, and that's why they was attached."

"Did you see the show?" asked Sammy, cautiously.

"No, but they say that the fellow that worked them things was just simply putrid."

"Discovered," whispered Betty so that no one heard it but Sammy.

"But," continued Luke, "they do say that the girl with the pink tights and gold shoes was a pippin sure and certain. They say she danced as light as a thistledown and sang like a lark, and if they can find any one to dance better than that or sing sweeter than a lark she must be a real pippin and no mistake."

"At last, at last," whispered Betty, mischievously.

"I'll let you into a secret," said Sammy, as though conferring a great favor upon Luke, "that girl wasn't real, she was just a dummy."

"You don't say so?" said Luke, open-mouthed, while Sissy, to assure herself of the truth of this statement slyly stuck a pin in Betty, who gave a cry of pain. Sissy jumped while Luke said, wondering: "It moved."

"Now, we are in for it good and plenty," muttered Sammy to himself, while he turned to Luke, saying gravely: "Don't touch it—it is on springs. Winds up with clock work. Dances and talks."

"I'd like to see it work," said Luke, greatly taken with the idea, "can you make it go?"

"It is easy. Anyone can do it. Why, I often carry one around with me on my travels over the country to make my customers laugh, for if you can get people to laugh they grow so mellow that they buy."

"Oh, go on, make this one go. Make me laugh," said Luke, coaxingly, while Sissy got behind Luke.

Betty said a few words in an undertone to Sammy, but Luke heard the sound and again Sammy was obliged to throw himself into the breach, and finally said that it was possible but, not until Luke had checked his trunk, as he must make this train. To this Luke demurred, saying that it could not be done until five minutes before the train left.

"Oh, Lordy," thought Sammy, "we are lost," then struck by a bright idea, he said:

"Say, if I work the figures will you check this trunk?"

"Sissy, shall we?" asked Luke, burning with desire to see this wonder. The poor girl began to stammer her consent, and Betty suddenly opened her mouth with a mechanical expression and said:

"Fatty. Hello, Fatty."

"Why, she talks, too, don't she?" said Luke.

Sammy made a clever pretense of winding up the mechanical doll and then stood her down on the platform and she, who had seen the dance manytimes, found no difficulty in imitating it very cleverly, to the great delight of Sissy and Luke. Then hastened by Sammy's order, Luke checked the drummer's trunk for New York, while the New York Express dashed to the station and in another minute the trunk had gone on its way while Betty hurriedly cast the figures into their trunk and Sammy under cover of the train lifted Betty's trunk to the baggage car, leaving the dummies to be rescued later. Betty could not reach the car, so Sammy bent over and she nimbly climbed upon his back and from there to the car, while he said he would devote the next ten minutes to obtaining the chicken, which, Betty assured him was a paramount necessity just now, and she added, with a spice of her old gaiety:

"And do hurry, Sammy, and I'll dress and be ready for breakfast when you get back."

"Me for the chickens," said Sammy, with more outward show of courage than he inwardly felt. But he hastened in the direction of the small build-

ing which Betty had pointed out to him as the residence of the hen family.

Maude and Mr. Logan had been in the telephone booth, he trying with commendable patience to get in touch with some one in Washington, and she, out of pity for his loneliness, remained to prevent him from feeling too lonely, as he was a stranger in a strange place. He had rather encouraged her to remain, as her tongue was a very nimble one and she was as wax in his hands with regard to the history of every family in the place. He had his own reasons for wishing to know all there was to tell, for to let the reader into a secret, Philip Logan was a Secret Service man and had been sent from Washington on purpose to make an investigation of the post office at Logan's Corners, and to discover the thief who had been robbing the mails.

Maude had found herself obliged by the arrival of several persons who had business in or about the depot, to leave Logan, and she had apparently started for home on foot, but as soon as she had passed a clump of bushes by the roadside she turned and again found that she had forgotten to make some purchases of Luke. Just what she could not have said, but she would know as soon as she saw his wares.

Before she had returned, Logan went to the mail bag which still lay upon the platform. He could not quite understand the neglect and did not know whether to attribute its abandoned position to the strict honesty of the people, which had begotten an infinite trust or whether the care-

less way of treating it was due to the neglect of the postmaster. He felt that the United States mail was a very sacred trust, and, however honest the inhabitants of the town beyond or the men about the station, a mail bag should not be left about in this way. He picked up the bag and hefted it. It certainly was light, but even if there had been but one letter inside, that letter was as sacred as if the bag had been crammed full. He laid the bag on the truck, and then saw the handbill which the constable had left there in his hurried departure in search of mythical thieves. He read with surprise:

"Auction sale of grocery and fixtures on June 5th, to satisfy claim of \$350, judgment against Wm. Meredith. Jade Bender, Constable. Now, Meredith is the postmaster here—it is a judgment against the postmaster—and the mails have been robbed. Hum! Every indication that he did need the money. But, where and how did he manage to get those lost checks and money orders cashed? And that makes it all the worse."

While Logan was thinking deeply over this problem, Luke came hurrying back, saying in astonishment: "Say, where is the show troupe's baggage? Did the constable take them away?"

"I suppose so," replied Logan, "I did not notice."

"Well, I am glad of it. They worried me. You see, I am——"

"Just one moment. Answer me one question."

"Can't," said Luke, looking about and seeing

that Sissy was deep in her book again, "my time is very important—you see, I'm——"

"Will you give me one dollar's worth of your time?"

"Can't do it. I must work all day to-day."

"I don't want all day—I want just two minutes."

"That'll be five cents," replied Luke.

"Well, you keep the dollar now. Is this the way your mail bags are thrown around each day the train arrives?"

"Yep, that's about it, mister. What about it?"

"Nothing, only aren't you afraid that some one will steal them or open them?"

"No, sirree—not while I am about. I'm pretty fly, I am."

"I know all about that—but when are they delivered to the post office?"

"Old man Meredith calls for them just after train time."

"But these have been here over half an hour."

"Oh, nobody'll touch 'em here in plain daylight, and he is old and no good and it takes him longer now-a-days. He can't afford to ride and it is quite a walk. We are going to put a younger man in the post office as soon as Burton gets him out."

"Does Mr. Burton want him out?"

"Yes, he has been missing checks and things, and well—he don't like him anyhow. But, you see, Meredith had a pull with President McKinley, and they was soldiers together in the big

war, and he's got a letter from McKinley that might save him."

"Thanks," said Logan aloud, while he thought, "Aha, the plot thickens!"

"If you wait here you can see the old man. He was a soldier and they shot his arm off, and he is a good fellow all but this."

"I may wait," said Logan, as though almost anything was preferable to sitting alone. "Now," he muttered to himself, "this presents some unusual complications. In debt—to be sold out—Burton don't like him, young Burton looks like a graceless scamp, well, this is a good case and looks like a long stay." and saying these last words Logan went and sat down on a truck that Luke had pushed over just before the freight car which still stood there. He took the local paper and endeavored to interest himself in the doings of the people at Logan's Corners, but with small success for his mind would still return to the tangle he had been sent to unravel.

Betty was in that car, making her change of costume as well as she could under the circumstances. The door had proved refractory when she tried to close it, and rather than wait the uncertain return of the foraging party she found a large piece of canvas and drew it across the opening and fastened it there. It was wide enough but was too short and her little feet, still shod in the famous gold shoes, twinkled back and forth as she hurried for fear of interruption. With her usual light-heartedness she forgot the trials of the past night in the knowledge that she

had her trunk and could now make herself presentable. The prospect of a breakfast also helped to cheer her and she lifted her voice in song, but she did not lift it high for fear of the constable whom she knew was seeking her. Logan, sitting there realized that some one was in the freight car, and he coughed twice and scraped his feet along the gravel walk to let the girl inside know that he was there. Betty thought it was Sammy who had returned, and said blithely:

"Well, did you get the chickens? You certainly made a quick job of it. Don't come in,—I—am—ah—dressing. I'll soon be ready for breakfast."

Logan looked at the car to make sure that he had not found a sleeper by mistake, but it was too plainly a freight car, a fact which added to his surprise. He saw that dainty, neat little pair of gilded shoes, and wondered who it was that could be dressing in there in such gay spirits, but as he remained silent, Betty said:

"Don't go away, honey boy, and don't sit on the eggs. This bath tub is small but it is fine. Ah, say, kiddo, throw me that towel. I dropped it, hurry up now, I'm freezing."

Logan looked for the towel which had caught against a nail and was trying to think of a way to throw it back when Betty said, impatiently:

"Oh, hurry up. Don't be all day. Have you got the *uncinarius duodenalis*?"

"The what?" said Logan, so surprised that his voice, which might have betrayed him was a husky whisper. He waited, but not long, for her

reply, which was: "Well, the hook worm, if you don't know Latin, also called the 'lazy bug.'"

This had its effect and Logan threw the towel, which fell into Betty's hand, while she said blithely:

"That's the boy. Say, what is that you are smoking? A rope or a felt hat? That is an awful cigar. Trow it away. You will spoil my appetite for breakfast. Now, see if you can get some glasses for the milk. I'll bet you wasn't stopped by a strawberry bush and offered some for our breakfast—our matutinal banquet? Why don't you answer me? Say, boy, hang this wig out there on that post to air"; and saying these words Betty handed Logan the blonde wig that had been so much admired while she wore it "on the road." Inwardly amused, Logan took the shining wig and hung it where the little hand had pointed, and the irrepressible Betty again began her trilling, which sounded incongruous coming from the interior of a freight car, but which was nevertheless very sweet. Then the unseen singer took down the impromptu curtain and stood revealed in the doorway, a very bright, and neat, and also pretty young girl. As she let the canvas drop she asked: "And, well, I am ready to eat. How is your appetite?"

"Very good, thank you," said Logan in his own voice. Betty, whom nothing had ever surprised, sat down suddenly in the door of the car showing a white and frightened little face, as she said:

"Well, I'll be dog-goned!"

"I beg your pardon," said Logan, divided between a desire to laugh loud and long, and a wish to reassure the child, for such she looked to him. The long night in the freight car had not dimmed the brightness of her eyes nor faded the youthful color from her cheeks, and she looked as sweet and fresh as though she had been the pampered darling of some millionaire's home. In reply to Logan's demand for pardon she replied frankly:

"It is yours. Outside of that I am broke. Say, who are you?"

"I've been your maid for the last few minutes."

"You are not going to arrest me, are you?" she said, with a pitiful little quiver of the chin.

"You are not a road detective, are you?"

"No, I am not a road detective."

"Well, I am glad of that. For the last twenty-four hours I've been meeting nothing but sheriffs and constables and railroad detectives."

"You haven't been stealing anything, have you?"

"Yes, I have. I had to," she added with a sharp little air of mutinous anger.

"What, a little lady like you stealing?"

"Yes, sir; I stole a ride on this car, and Sammy is now stealing, or trying to steal eggs and things for our breakfast which will be luncheon and dinner of yesterday all in one, and I hope he won't make a mistake, or fail. Now, I have confessed, and what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing, except help you if I can."

"You are not going to get fresh and want to kiss me, are you?"

"I should say not!"

"Oh, you mean that I am not worth kissing. Hum—let me tell you lots of better men than you have tried to and didn't. Who are you, anyway?"

"Well, just at present I am a gentleman of leisure."

"We had one in our play and killed him in the first act."

"I hope you won't serve me the same way," said Logan, laughing. This sprightly, yet honest young girl interested him strangely. Her utter fearlessness and confidence in herself fascinated him. It was like the daring of a little child that knows no danger and yet plays with it at the peril of its life. She looked so dainty, so neat and girlish as she sat in the door of the dingy car, that she seemed like a painting by some great artist, in a dusty frame. She held a strange charm for him with her funny assumption of worldly knowledge. And her voice was so sweet and clear that he longed to hear her sing again.

"No," she said, after a moment's grave reflection, "I guess we won't take your life. You seem to be all right. Our show busted last night, and say—I don't know why I am telling you all this."

"Because you know you can trust me and that I will help you, if I can."

"Oh, I am not so sure after all. I have traveled some and these small town fellers would do you quicker than the New Yorkers."

"I quite agree with you, for I know. I have lived in both places."

Betty favored her new acquaintance with one long, searching look, and then said quietly: "I guess you are all right. You can sit on my veranda if you want to."

"Thanks," said Logan, stifling a laugh. He jumped up and sat down in the doorway, regardless of the dust. He still held the paper in his hand. He opened the conversation by asking where she was going.

"Jail, maybe, but New York preferred. You see, we were attached and——"

"I know all about it. I was there."

"At the show?"

"Yes, front row."

"How did you like it?" asked Betty bravely, although there was a big lump in her throat.

"I liked you."

"Oh, you are just jollying me!" said Betty, her cheeks burning red. This was the first time she had ever talked with any one not connected with her chosen occupation who looked so like a real gentleman.

"The balance of the show was pretty bad—I must confess."

"Yes, that was the general opinion most everywhere."

"Can I help you to reach New York?" asked Logan, in the most matter-of-fact way, for he thought rightly that she would accept frankly without a sign of false pride, and in the spirit with which he made the offer.

After a second's hesitation, she replied in a straightforward manner, "Yes; if you will let me borrow the money."

"I'll do that gladly. How much will you want?"

"There's two of us, Sammy and me."

"Your husband?" asked Logan with a little sting of disappointment, or some other unwonted sentiment somewhere, but she turned wide eyes at him, saying:

"No, I am not married. I'd be a fine looking kid to go carrying a husband around—can't even carry myself, it seems. No, he is just one of us—he's a good kid, and we worked together."

"A sweetheart?" hazarded Logan, hoping in the depths of his heart that she would say no.

"Not much—none of the sweethearts for mine."

"You're a regular man hater, maybe?"

"Oh, no, I hope I shall marry some day, and have my own little home. I want a real big handsome man, when I do marry—one that will just love me and me alone, who will take care of me, and he must be smart, and do things that make me look up to him."

"Well, that sounds better. I suppose he must be a millionaire."

"No, I don't think I would want a millionaire, nor a very rich man. That might divide us and I'd want my husband to be mine and all mine. I can keep house, and so that we had our own home, and enough to eat and wear I guess there wouldn't be a happier woman in this country. I

guess now you think I am human, although I am a soubrette."

"Well, you see—judging from what I've seen of——"

"I know you fellows that sit out in front don't know that under that paint and blonde wig and short dress we have hearts that beat and brains that think and feelings—oh, what's the use—you can't make any one believe it. But if it was not for us to make you laugh and entertain you, and stand up on the stage and let you guy us, why you'd be so grouchy after a long day's work, you'd go home and beat your wives or toast your toes at the fire and brood over your troubles. So you see we are some good. Say, figure up how much are two tickets to New York and a dollar left to buy something to eat."

Logan still held the constable's notice and taking this he began to figure upon it. "Let me see. The fare is three dollars, and two tickets would be six, and one dollar would be eight. You'd better take ten."

Betty's bright eyes had seen the paper which he had been using and seized it from his hand, asking breathlessly:

"Say, mister, where did you get this constable sale."

"What's the matter? Why are you trembling? Are you sick, little girl? Let me——"

"No, I'm not sick—I'm all right now. Say, will you really lend me that ten dollars? I'll pay you back, honest I will. You can trust me, sir."

"But why are you so agitated? What is it?"

"Yes—I will tell you," said Betty, gaining courage. "That is my daddy's place they are going to sell. I live here, Betty Meredith, and I haven't seen my father in four years. I must get that money. I must go to New York. The manager must pay me back. He *shall* pay me back. I helped him out when he was in trouble and now my old daddy's going to be sold out, and I left him all alone to fight it out—you were right, sir—I guess we are all unfeeling—my poor old daddy. Oh, you don't know, sir, it will kill him. He is old and is so kind, and they have ruined him. My daddy is the most honest, honorable, upright and noble of men—do you know, he has the right to wear not only the badge of the G. A. R., and the medal that he won but the tiny little bow of ribbon in his buttonhole that signifies 'for conspicuous bravery on the battlefield.'" And Betty broke down and sobbed disconsolately.

Logan felt very much like crying himself, but he compromised by drawing the pretty head to his shoulder and wiping away her tears with his own handkerchief, and, by the way, it may be mentioned that this same handkerchief was laid away as one of the most precious of his possessions and sacredly kept. As the poor child, for she was scarcely more, grew a little more calm, she continued:

"You see he is postmaster here. He was appointed by McKinley, and he will lose that too, and I am afraid it would kill him—he is so proud that McKinley respected him so."

"Her daddy! Poor little girl!" he thought, then said:

"Why did you leave home, if you loved him so much?"

"Too much stepmother."

CHAPTER V

BETTY IS HOME AGAIN

Just as Betty was saying "too much step-mother," Jade Bender led by Luke and Sissy and accompanied by the melancholy Charlie came towards the car cautiously, Bender, with more than usual importance, if such a thing were possible, and Luke, continuing his narration. "He knows all about it" he was saying. Betty caught sight of Bender and gasped:

"The constable," and aided by Logan she darted inside the car, Logan awaiting developments. Bender walked pompously to Logan, saying as he pointed to the badge he wore:

"You will excuse me, stranger, but I am the constable and I am after a party who has stolen some property that was in the hands of the law."

"Ah, just a moment. Let me see your warrant or attachment."

"Oh, I've got it. I know the law. I'm Judge Bender, and I never missed bringing those charged with wrongdoing to justice."

Sissy now caught sight of the blonde wig, and this to her was proof that the mechanical doll, as she at first supposed Betty to be, and had later determined could not have been a doll, had really

been one. She had been so sure that she had won Luke to her opinion, and he being so wrapped up in his desire to become a detective, had listened to her and had given Bender a tip which had resulted in his presence at this inopportune moment.

Sammy had in some occult manner procured a few eggs, and thinking them better than nothing, had returned, and was so surprised to see the awful majesty of the law present in the person of Bender, that he dropped them incontinently, and ran the other way. Bender saw the arrival and hasty flight and called out with more energy than elegance, "Who the devil is that running?"

Logan stepped forward saying he had engaged the man to procure some eggs for him from the grocery and that he was in a hurry to get back to his store. This might have passed muster had not Charlie said that the man did not belong around here. And, he added in another pessimistic burst of prophecy, that the man would surely fall and break his ankle.

"Well, and what have you got to say about those papers?" asked Bender angrily, "I'm a very busy man and I want to get the prisoner."

"Don't get excited, Mr. Bender," said Logan quietly, "and don't be in a hurry."

"I want \$21.65 and costs or to jail they go."

"They won't go to jail, officer, because they left that amount with me to satisfy the debt," and saying this Logan took the attachment papers and looked them over and then said, and in a manner which somehow conveyed the idea of a superior

force to the town constable: "Come with me inside, as I want a receipt." And the constable holding tight to his chin whiskers with one hand, held his billy so that it was ready for instant use. They went into the station.

Betty, peeping out, gave a sigh a relief and whispered, "He's the hero of this melodrama," while Charlie called after Bender, saying, "Are you sure it's good money?"

Sammy, taken by surprise, had run as fast as he could go, but after a few rods he stopped, thinking how cowardly it was of him to abandon poor Betty, alone in a strange place, and so during the confusion consequent to the interference of Logan he crept back and under the car he gave the familiar "coo-coo" by which all the members of the company had called one another when separated. Betty was so agitated that she could scarcely make a sound, yet Sammy heard her, and as he crept out from under the car on her side he asked what was the matter with her voice and if she had sprained it. "I was afraid the constable had you."

"Here, Sammy, we must get away, sooner than ever now. It is ten dollars, real money, I borrowed it to get two tickets to New York. I must get that money I loaned to manager Jacobs, and don't ask questions, but read this," giving him the constable's notice.

"I don't know what you mean, Betty," said Sammy.

"That man is my father, Sam, and I must get

that money. Go, let me know when the train comes and I will come out. Go."

Sammy, not without some misgivings regarding the intentions of the constable, went for the tickets, while Betty hastened to pack her things, as they had been scattered about while she was hastily donning a dainty street costume, which set off her delicate and pretty face and figure even better than had the more ornamental stage dress with the historic pink stockings.

Just as she had finished there was the sharp sound of an automobile outside the station and in another instant Claude Burton hurried through the waiting room to the platform where Bender now was, and they held a hurried whispered conversation. Claude said: "Thanks, Bender, I will do as much for you some day. Look after that car of mine, will you?"

"I just feel sure that he will blow up in that thing some day and kill several persons," said Charlie gloomily, looking at the big machine as it struggled and panted like a thing of life.

Betty now sprang down from her late resting place and went to a box where she sat down waiting for the next train, forgetting her hunger in her distress for her father. Sammy returned with the tickets and reading the constable's proclamation as he came to her, followed by Claude, although he did not know it. Claude went to where Betty sat, and planting himself directly in front of her, he said:

"Hello, Betty!"

"Good morning, Mr. Burton," replied Betty icily.

"Now, Betty, why the mister? You always said Claude four years ago. I want it to be Claude again."

"I prefer Mr. Burton."

"All right, have it your own way; you always were a sassy kid, when you worked in father's mill. I didn't stand very well with you then, but I liked you just the same, and I like you more now, and I am glad you are coming back."

"How do you know I am coming back?"

"The troupe is busted, so what else can you do?"

"What do you mean? What troupe?"

"Don't do the baby stare. Don't act so innocent. That singing in the choir might do for the rubes at Logan's Corners, but not with me. I'm wise. I was there."

"You have either been drinking or you are smoking too many cigarettes, and please don't blow your smoke in my face."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Betty Bell, queen of soubrettes."

"You always were a fresh kid, as you grow older you grow fresher. Go on with your nasty cigarette."

"Ah, you make me laugh. Ha! ha! ha! you can't stand cigarettes. That's good, for all actresses smoke. Here, have one, be a good fellow—a sport," and here Claude offered Betty the box of expensive cigarettes which he smoked to such excess, but she slapped them out of his hand so

that they fell to the ground and stamped on them, grinding them into the gravel. Then, like a woman, her overwrought nerves gave way and she cried bitterly. Claude laughed, saying:

"And those were the last I had. You are all right, Betty, you always did hand it to me. But say—let's make up and be friends. I always said when I was a boy that some day I would marry an actress—and now that I am a man I am going to do it."

"Please go away and let me alone," said Betty, piteously.

"I want to marry you right now, Betty, I don't care what dad says, and I don't care if it would work ruin to our family name by having you in the family—I'll take the chance in all that. Say, when you came out in those gold shoes I just went nutty over you."

"Say, Mr. Burton, let me give you a little advice. You go home and put a cold towel on your head and forget it, forget it, I say."

"But, Betty, I mean it. Honest I do. Say, but you do look stunning in the blonde wig and tights. I'll give you anything you want, and I'll buy you a show of your own, and I'll travel with it. That would be jolly sport. When you come out in those tights and all the boys say, 'Ain't she great,' I'll say, 'She's mine, all mine.' That will be the greatest out! Gee, that will be going some!"

"Poor boy! You will never grow up. You were foolish when I left four years ago, and now

—it has grown worse a thousand times, oh, what's the use?"

"Betty, will you marry me?"

"No."

"Don't you trifle with me," said Claude, threateningly.

"Go home to your mamma."

"You think I am a kid, do you? Well, I'll show you. I offer to do the right thing and you throw me down. Well, I'll tell the whole town about you. How will your daddy feel? I'll get even. By God, I'll have you anyway. You'll find out that I offered the right thing——"

As Claude said this Logan came to him hurriedly, saying:

"Mr. Burton, you kindly offered to take me to the town this morning, and I had some business to attend to, but now, if you will give me a place in your fine machine I shall be greatly obliged. I think we are going to have a thunder storm and do not wish to get wet, and in fact, to speak very frankly, the one thing I am afraid of is a thunder storm, and there is so much steel about——"

"Well, come on then," said Claude, who also felt willing to get away from the station, and they started off to the machine.

Betty sat alone, the tears chasing each other down the pretty face, which was now growing pale. She was thinking of her father and his danger, and she sobbed: "Poor old daddy. I am just heartsick to see him, but I must get that

money first. Poor old daddy! I wish the train would come."

As Betty said these words her father came through the waiting room and walked feebly out to the place where Logan had thrown the mail sack, and picking it up he felt the first drops of rain. There was a sudden puff of wind which lifted his snow white hair and blew it into his eyes. He had to place the bag on the ground while he brought the floating locks under his hat as he had but one arm, the other having been sacrificed to his country when he had been in the army. As soon as the stray locks had been attended to, he took the mail sack again and started out to cross the road in an endeavor to reach Logan's before the rain should become heavy. Peal on peal of thunder rolled, and flash after flash brightened the darkness, for in one moment it had grown as dark as night.

He was nearly blinded by the dust that flew before the rain, and that with the noise, confused the old man so that he failed to hear the noise of the automobile which Claude was sending forward at full speed, and in another instant Mr. Meredith was struck and hurled to the earth. There was one scream of agony and Claude stopped the machine at Logan's stern command. A crowd gathered to help the injured man. Bender shouted:

"Some one is hurt by the auto," and to do him justice he was as ready to punish the man who owned the machine as he had been to catch the unfortunate fugitives from a board bill.

Charlie shouted: "I just knowed he'd kill some one, who is it?" and Luke replied that he didn't know, but to come quick.

In a short time the crowd which had gathered as by a miracle came in, following Logan, who was carrying Meredith in his arms, and who laid him tenderly on the platform. Claude followed, frightened almost to death, for he well knew that this was the father of the girl he loved. Claude in his fear shouted, "It is old man Meredith. My God! Betty's father! I hope I didn't kill him, for it will go hard with me. Take him in my machine to the hospital."

"Hush," said Logan, in a compelling voice, "he is not dead."

There was a faint moan and then the injured man cried out shrilly:

"I want my Betty; Betty, my little girl Betty."

Whether he had seen her as her frightened face showed from behind the car, or whether some inner sense told him she was near, who can say, but he did not need to call the second time, for Betty, with one scream, pushed the crowd aside and knelt beside her father and took his silvery head in her strong young arms, while she said:

"I am here, Daddy, Betty is here. You can't take him to the hospital, not while I live. I'm going to take you home, daddy, home," and, then with a flash of her old spirit she added: "step-mother or no stepmother. I can stand for myself and you now, and I shall take you home, Daddy."

"Why, Betty, is that you?" said Bender, "You needn't fear your stepmother, for she's been dead

two years. Now, let's carry him to his home."

Logan took off his rain coat and wrapped the almost unconscious figure in it and strong arms lifted the injured man and carried him to the machine. The storm had spent its wild fury and the sky was growing lighter, as they took him home. Sammy had seen the affair from a short distance and not wishing to trouble Betty he had jumped aboard the train that had come along and stopped long enough for him to rescue his puppets and get on his way to New York, and it is safe to say that he had sought for the buffet as soon as the train was fairly out of the depot. He wrote a note on a postal card telling Betty that he had gone, and dropped it at the first station, which happened to be the very place where he and Betty had climbed into the baggage car the night before.

"And poor, bright, good little Betty, I'll get that money for her if I have to sandbag someone," said Sammy.

CHAPTER VI

BETTY AT HOME AGAIN, TO CARE FOR HER DADDY.

Two weeks had passed since Mr. Meredith had been wounded, and the most of that time he had lain in a stupor. He was conscious only at intervals, and then he would see Betty hovering over his couch like a ministering angel. In those hours Betty learned to the full what it meant to be a woman. Night after night she scarcely slept and during the day she tended the store and post office as well, and looked over the books to discover who owed and who did not owe her father, hoping that she might be able to collect some of the outstanding bills.

The living rooms were in back of the store with two bedrooms on the second floor. The parlor at the back of the store was furnished more like a military camp than a home where a woman's hand had added those little touches that make a home so pleasant. On one side of the large window hung a picture of Lincoln, the good and worthy, while a picture of McKinley hung on the other side. Both were draped with crape.

To see Betty, the once bright little will-'o-the-wisp, as she was now, burdened with the cares of a woman, and bearing them bravely and with

the determination to do the best she could, was a revelation. Again and again did she force herself to remember that *mind* was *all* and that the body could not be more powerful than *mind*, and so in her inmost heart she repeated over and over and relied upon that great truth which she had either read somewhere or had heard, whichever it was it fortified her as nothing else could, and she worked hard, planned a new regime for the store, and cared for her father with the infinite tenderness of a mother for her babe. And she never lost courage, but did hourly the duty that presented itself.

But there was a time when her father was so very ill that he knew nothing and required the constant care of a strong man, to keep him from injuring himself while the access of the fever was upon him.

It was then that Betty leaned hardest upon the great truth she had discovered, and kept her courage, knowing in her heart that all would be well. One of the old men who had fought through the war in the same company that Meredith had belonged to volunteered to watch, and then another relieved him until the whole four veterans who lived in Logan's were enrolled among the nurses, and they insisted that Betty should rest all that night which the doctor had said would be the critical point in his illness. He had had concussion of the brain, the doctor said, and must be kept quiet even by force if his delirium should take a violent turn.

Betty was worn out by her heavy labors, and

finally consented to rest on condition that if he took a turn for the worse she should be called.

"But, what's the use of all that fuss when I know that he will be all right. And, even so, they cannot frighten me. I know more than some of them do, for I know now that there is no such thing as death. It is only changing about a little and no worse than moving into another house. I will rest for I have a lot to do and am tired. It is awful good of Luke and Charlie to bring the mail sacks up. Gee, but I am sleepy!"

She kissed the flushed face and patted the burning hands and then unwillingly went to her room, leaving her father in the hands of his four old comrades.

Two of the men had fought at Fredericksburg under Burnside, one in the 16th New York, and the other in the 69th New York, both of which regiments were in the hottest of the fight at the storming of Salem Heights. The fourth was an old Confederate soldier, who had lost his right arm in the war, and after all was over he had drifted to this place and settled, but things had gone very badly with him, and had it not been for the unfailing kindness of Meredith he would have starved.

In a minute Betty was asleep. The doctor made an unexpected visit fearing that this night of crisis would find the old man so weakened that he would pass out like the fogs that so often settled down in the valley to disappear in the sun of the morning. His patient was still unconscious, and breathing heavily, almost stertorous-

ly. The doctor shook his head and went sadly out.

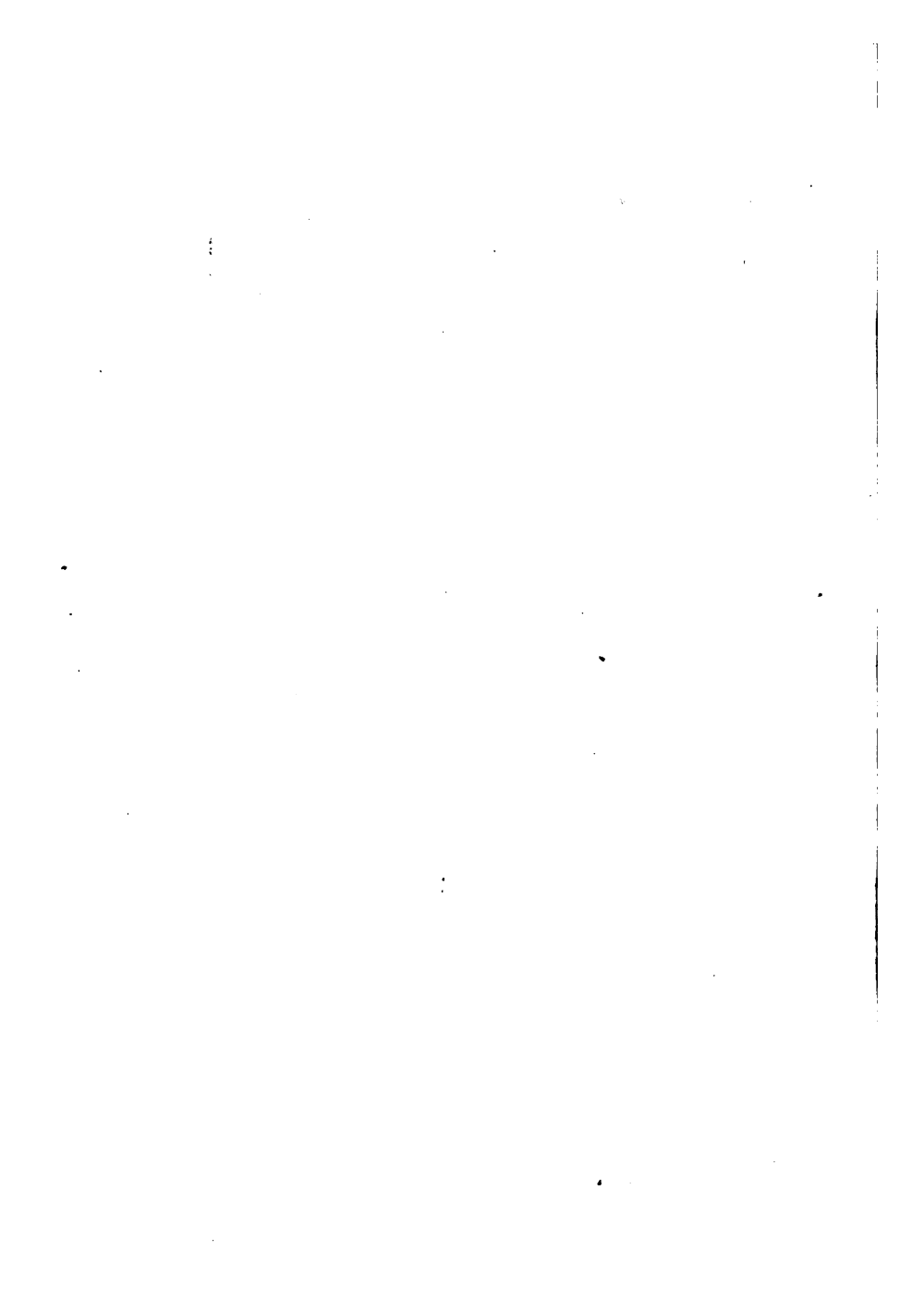
The two men took turns watching by the bed, while the other two sat in the parlor down stairs and smoked and talked in low tones. All night the old man had tossed and moaned, burning with fever, and his old comrades gave him cool drinks and kept his head wet with ice water. There seemed to be so little chance that they looked at one another despairingly, but at last the muttering and moans ceased and he slept. They knew that this was a symptom to be desired and gave him his medicine as ordered, and then as he seemed to slumber soundly one of them spoke:

"Do you know, to-day I heard something that knocked me out. You know I was in the 16th New York, and at the big battle of Fredericksburg we were under the command of a young fellow, that is he was a young fellow then, a captain in Burnside's corps, the Sixth. He was six feet six, broad-shouldered and one of the finest looking men I ever saw. The officers told him always to keep in the background as he was so big and tall he would be an easy mark. His name was Newton Martin Curtis, and after all the dangers that he ran on account of his size and being wounded three times mortally, as was thought, and losing his left eye, he died yesterday of heart disease at his own doorstep."

"I remember him too. The day we had the hottest fight he just led the whole of his troops, and the funny thing about it was that—you re-



BETTY REFUSES TO ALLOW HER FATHER TO BE TAKEN TO THE HOSPITAL.



member we wore caps with visors then—and he always turned the visor of his cap to the back when fighting and would rush at 'em that way. Every time we had a brush and we had many of them in those days, he did the same thing, turned his cap around and forgot everything else. He was the biggest hearted and the bravest of men. I can't help it, but by God, I'm like to cry like a girl when I think of that noble man and the things he'd do."

"I could tell you something about him too," said the other, "for when I got this shot that took off half my shoulder, he just lifted me in his arms and carried me off and up four flights of stairs to a sort of private hospital where they said there was no more room. He took me clean to the top of the building and had me stripped and in a cot belonging to one of the nurses when the surgeons came. I reckon he used some pretty strong arguments with them to persuade them to keep me. You are right, Brigadier General Newton Curtis, as he became afterward, was a man, a noble man, a good soldier, as tender as a woman, and as fierce as a lion when his blood was up. He—well—I feel so too."

"We—had—lots of men—like that—in those days——" came in a faint voice from the bed, and both old soldiers winked their eyes hard before they could see clearly, but when they did they found that Meredith's eyes now beamed with the light of reason, although he was very weak.

"When I get better we will all join in and send

a wreath to lay on his grave. God keep him, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven!"

"We will," said the watchers, "but now you must try to sleep."

"I will—but—it is queer, but it seemed to me that my little girl has been around me and—I don't see her. I guess it was a—dream."

"No, old boy, she is here, but we made her rest for she has been with you ever since you were hurt. Now, go to sleep and when you wake she will be with you."

"Good night, then. Dear little Betty, my little snapdragon, my only delight," said the father, smiling happily until he dropped asleep again.

The two men then tiptoed down stairs and in a few minutes more they were all talking over war times and their battles, for it was a subject that never grew wearisome to them. They had smelled powder together, they had charged the batteries that dealt death, with every spit of flame and shell, and they had been wounded and in prison and shared their last crusts and last drops of water—while not knowing what the next second might bring forth. Such things make men more than brothers.

"I was in the Army of the Potomac, and was at what they called the 'bloody angle'—and bloody it was I can tell you," said one of them.

"I ought to know," said the old Confederate. "It was said that Hancock was to attack our Salient and—he did it—and so well that he left nothing to be desired from the point of view of fighting on either side.

"The corner which had been called the Bloody Angle was a horrible place to see. It was so trampled and so soaked in blood that we sank into it up to our knees. That was fighting—ah—yes."

"And," said the first speaker, "that was where Meredith was hurt so badly that it was four months before he was well enough to get his left arm shot off. And I lost my right one in the same battle. But I never seemed to understand the position as seen from the other side."

"Come into the grocery and I'll show you," said the Confederate, his eyes blazing and his cheeks glowing.

They went into the grocery, lighted the lamp and set about reconstructing the battle field as it had been, showing the positions of the two armies at the deadly Bloody Angle, and fought the battle over again, small boxes and vegetable cans forming the fortification and the advancing and fighting troops.

"Here is the Angle and here the Southern troops, under General Edward Johnson—nearly all the living taken prisoners—the rest left dead, or desperately wounded—funny the chances of war sometimes. After the fight was over some Federals saw a boot leg rise up out of the mud, and by Joe, there was a living soldier attached to it. He was pulled out and washed and he is a strong and healthy man to-day, while others—ping! and no more was ever heard of them. And, when there was a fierce resistance and one that carried the day, the soldiers that fell were all laid

along in a trench like matches in a box, at the foot of a hill, and a big monument was put up to glorify the general who kept out of the firing line all the time. And folks go now and put flowers on the general's grave but nothing much if anything on the soldiers' lying tucked in down below. But, after all, it has to be so, I suppose."

"It would need a bigger book than could ever be printed to tell of the chances of war. Men that were fighting like demons one minute would be carrying one another off to safety the next. Men in camp on one side the Potomac, getting ready to kill the men on the other side, made little sail boats of shingles and sent them across the river to make the exchange of tobacco for coffee, sugar or quinine."

"Well, the war is over, but we who were in it can never forget and we must hang together 'lest we forget.'"

"Yes, but, look, it is daylight and we'd better put these things back and see how he is now, and see if Betty needs any more help," said the man with one arm.

The old man above was still sleeping and they sat down until Betty had made them a cup of coffee and prepared a good breakfast. Then the Confederate soldier took his position by the bedside while the others reposed after their long watches.

At Logan's there were no trained nurses to be obtained and had there been Betty could not have afforded to pay one. The hospital was mostly for the use of the people who worked in the mills and

who were being injured by the machinery almost daily. Burton had built the hospital, as it happened that the law of that state required that he should pay for any injury to his employees while in the pursuance of their business, and so he could force them to go to this hospital and pay for treatment or board and treatment if they were entirely incapacitated. Burton was one of those men who not only squeeze the lemon dry but find use for the rind and seeds. Everything was grist that came to his mill or was made to mean money for him. Abroad, he passed for a philanthropic man, who had built and equipped this hospital for the benefit of his work people. But the people had small opportunity to tell the truth which was that the hospital was but another mill to grind them still finer.

Towards afternoon Betty went to her father with a bowl of delicious chicken broth, and he kissed the little hands that were now growing rough with unaccustomed labor. It was Logan who had brought this chicken, and Betty laughed and cried as she remembered how she had sent Sammy to capture just such a bird two weeks ago.

Mr. Meredith was improving rapidly now, and Betty would have been correspondingly happy had she not been haunted by the prospect of the sale. But somehow this appeared to have been dropped, at any rate, for the time being. At every leisure moment the poor girl sat puzzling her brain over her father's books, trying to bring some kind of order out of the confusion of bad

debts. She sent out many bills but very little money came in, as the operatives were very poor and the majority of them, by some sort of hocus-pocus, such as employers put in force, were all in debt to Burton. He had not forgiven them for having dared to go on strike when they had reached a point beyond which human nature could not go. He would make them all suffer. A few came to say they would pay as soon as they could, but the majority grew angry that they should be asked to pay for things eaten and forgotten, and they gave Betty nothing but sour looks and began buying at a new store, which really belonged to Burton. The goods sold there were greatly inferior and more expensive, but they found credit until such time as Burton was ready to shut down upon them and put the thumb screws on.

A couple of days more and Betty could give more time to the store, and her father was rapidly convalescing, although at times he would appear dazed for a few minutes and lose his memory for facts which he knew perfectly well and could recall at other times. It seemed as though the injury to his head was greater than it had appeared, for it had clearly affected his memory, but Betty hoped that it would return in time.

One day the old man said:

"Betty, my dear, I think you need help. I think you'd better hire some one. You mustn't lift those heavy things. Can't you get some one?"

"Well, father, all your old comrades have

helped me take care of you, and there is nobody else that I know of that I would care to have about. Captain Cook is helping me get the books in shape, and he will go around with the bills to those who owe us and it may be that we can collect something. I find there is a lot of money due you. Even Captain Cook owes you over a hundred dollars himself."

"I know, I know, but—wait a minute, Betty, my head seems so dazed. Yes, he does, but—Betty, how much am I worth to you?"

"Everything in the whole world, Daddy, everything."

"Well then, dearie, we owe everything in the world to the Captain, for he saved my life on the battle field. He saved me at the risk of his own life, and I should expect the good God to forget me if I forgot my debt to him."

"Why didn't you ever tell me this before? Well, he can live here and help us, can't he?"

"You are an angel, my dear little girl."

"Oh, not very much of an angel to wish to show that hero that I thank him for saving my daddy. I guess not."

Betty had many things to do, and her active hands were busy while her little feet that had danced so tirelessly now felt like lead, but she would say to herself, I am not used to it yet, but in a few more days it will be all right. Now, there is where it is so difficult to believe. Well, I know very well that I am all right so what's the use thinking of it. What a good thing that the customers in this small town nearly all take

their purchases with them. Ha—ha—I guess it is because they are afraid that I would not send them after all. Why is it that the folks here think daddy must sell them their groceries and then whistle for his money. I'm going to put a stop to it. 'That's what!'

The stock in the store began to show signs of depletion, as Betty could not attend to getting a new supply, and more than probably she could not have done so as the wholesale dealers who had always shipped Mr. Meredith his supply knew of the judgment against him. The cans of fruit and vegetables were few and in fact the whole long rows of shelves showed woeful hiatus. But she was a courageous little thing and her determined air went a long way towards upholding the tottering business. One afternoon she was again wrestling with the books, about two weeks from the day of her conversation with her father, and he was able to be down in the store again.

Mr. Meredith had grown much paler and his hair was now entirely white. But his gentle face and kindly manners had not changed. Charlie, the disconsolate, was sitting on a stool by the door, and a lady whom we have not seen before stood by the counter where there was a more or less tempting display of patent medicines.

This lady was sharp of feature and keen of eyes while her lips were always shut in a straight line as though she feared to let some great secret escape her. And she certainly had a nose for news, which probably had been the cause of her choice

of a profession, for she was a reporter for the local paper, and as some said, was the editor of the society column of the scandal page. She loved a scandal as a baby loves candy, and an old sailor loves his tobacco. She rolled it around in her mouth and seemed to delight in its unsavory odor. She was dressed in a plain but good gown of city make, and wore a hat which left much to be desired and not much to be seen of her head or hair. The sight of her unkind and habitually fault-finding face was not pleasant. Charlie in particular abominated her as she had said or written something that angered him, and like all despondent persons he nursed a grievance. Meredith was smiling in his usual childlike, amiable manner and continuing to weigh and reweigh the sugar for which Charlie was waiting, and she finally spoke up sharply:

"Please give me my mail and a box of Codliver Exhilarator."

"I was reading of a woman who took a quart once," said Charlie in a lugubrious voice, "and she died."

"What, of that medicine?"

"No, carbolic acid," resumed Charlie, in the same sad way.

"Charlie will have his joke," said Meredith. "Here is your mail and your medicine."

"I should call Charlie a born fool if I didn't know that he don't know enough to be one," said Mrs. Henderface, which was the lady's name. Charlie retaliated by saying without changing

a feature nor his habitual expression of settled misanthropy:

"That's so, I couldn't help it, but you grew into one, and you are still growing," and he turned to his book again as though such a woman as Mrs. Henderface never existed. She flushed red and rejoined:

"I did not hear his insulting reply. Mr. Meredith, I am getting a list of invited guests that are to attend the Burton party to be given at his house to-morrow night. Are you and Betty going?"

"I don't know, really. I haven't heard my daughter say—that is, I don't remember. Perhaps she did, but, you see since my accident I forget things so. Perhaps she did say. Why yes, I guess that Betty and I will be there."

"All the best folks in Logan's Corners are invited. It's going to be very *ultram*."

"Yes, I am sure it will," answered Meredith benignly, smiling in his gentle, unaffected, kindly way, "and I hope they'll have a pleasant time."

"Yes, I am sure it will, if the weather is fine. I am going to wear baby blue."

As Mrs. Henderface said this with a silly simper Charlie looked up from his book and with as near a smile as he ever permitted himself he said:

"I have been looking up the weather report and it says 'threatening' and that's sure to spoil the party."

"I guess you hope it will rain. You are not

invited. I believe only the best people—ah—I understand——”

“Even so,” answered Charlie, “they can’t stop you and me from sitting on the fence across the street.”

This made the lady very angry and she took revenge by saying:

“Excuse me, but I am invited. Here is my invite, fool. Now show yours.”

“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Henface,” said Charlie with a very solemn expression. Mr. Meredith shook his silvery head and whispered:

“Charlie, that is not right. Remember, she is a lady.”

“Not just because she wears skirts. She is a woman, but—well, I don’t like to throw a wet blanket on any one, but I feel that some great calamity is about to happen to her.”

The lady flounced off in a very irate condition of mind while Charlie sat the picture of sorrow and despondency as the imaginary vision of the departing lady loomed up before his mind.

At this moment Luke came singing up the street, bringing the mail sack which he dumped unceremoniously upon the floor, and said in answer to Mr. Meredith’s question as to what he could do for him, “Well, you can put up this list of things for mother,” and here he whispered in Meredith’s ear, “and she’ll be up next week sure to pay ’em. I want some tobacco, and stogies, and any letters there may be.”

“That’s all right, of course,” said Meredith,

sweetly, as though he had unlimited money and credit at the wholesaler's. Charlie muttered:

"It's a stand off. I don't like to say anything, but he will never get it.

"What are you saying, Cheerful," asked Luke, a little belligerently, for he had heard enough to give him the impression that his mother's honesty was in question. Charlie groaned:

"Oh, I was just saying that I would bet that you could beat Mr. Meredith at a game of checkers, but not me."

The old man was busy putting up the order which Luke had given and said, smiling kindly: "I'm too busy, boys, and am just a bit shaky yet, so you two play while I get the order filled."

"Come on," said Luke, "I'm your fast freight—steam up," and they took the checker board and sat down on two convenient kegs to play, a little out of the way of possible customers.

While they sat there Mr. Burton came in hurriedly, the way he always walked. Jade Bender, the constable, followed him more slowly, and they both stood before the old man who began to tremble, but he bowed and smiled, albeit the smile was tremulous. He bid them both a pleasant afternoon, and seemed to be trying to remember something which was an effort to recall. Burton nodded and gave a sound which might have been understood as a response to Meredith's greeting. Then, bracing himself, he said gruffly:

"I say, Meredith, I want to see you."

Bender, whose small eyes generally showed the brilliant glare of an animal that sees its prey,

was softened now in some indefinable way, and it is possible that he at the time felt some compunction for the part he was to play. Bender had a great idea of his own importance, and was not overkind at times in the pursuance of his duty, but at heart he was essentially honest and had a great respect for the law. He had some kind of a sensation quite new to him, and as he noted the tone of triumph in Burton's voice, and the air of satisfaction in his manner, he knew that there must be something to say on both sides in whatever question existed between the two men. So he whispered:

"Easy, easy, go slow," and pointed to the old man's head, and then turning to Meredith he said to him: "Mr. Burton has a little paper he wishes you to sign."

Meredith grew pale as the dead, and cast a hasty glance around his little store which was very dear to him, and gave a deep sigh as of renouncement, while Burton, a little less arbitrary and in a conciliating manner said mildly:

"You see, Meredith, my boy accidentally hit you with his car a month ago, and I want you to sign a release from any damage claim. Now, of course he did not do that on purpose, and he did not injure you seriously, and I was sure you didn't intend to sue me so I just made this out for you to sign."

Bender was uneasy. For the first time he felt that he was doing wrong, and his conscience troubled him, yet he was sure that Burton would never allow him to be re-elected if he refused,

and he held secret hopes of being sent to the Assembly after his term was up, at the next election. Seeing Meredith hesitate, and feeling himself under the cold glance of Burton's eyes, and knowing that he stood no chance at all if he did not do as Burton ordered, he said faintly:

"It is all right. I advised him to come to see you. Now, you wasn't seriously hurt, and you are all right now, ain't you?"

"Of course he isn't hurt," said Burton, with a pleasant look that hid the raging hatred that was burning in his heart. The old man took the pen, and then wavered, saying that he thought Betty should read it first, but between the two men and their persuasions Meredith did sign the release and Bender witnessed it. Then as Burton pocketed the paper the rage that he had been concealing so long broke forth as Meredith said in his now weak and quavering voice: "Well, gentlemen, I don't feel any effects of the accident, and it is only at times since I was hurt that I forget and grow a little excited when anything unusual happens—any worry you know—like that note I owe and the sale of my business. That worries me."

That had not appealed to Burton and he told Meredith that the note had nothing to do with the accident, and the poor victim said with his habitual kindness of heart:

"I know your boy did not intend to do it, and I am sure that you gentlemen would not ask me to do anything that is not right." As soon as

Burton had the paper in his pocket he said with a triumphant look:

"Why should you worry over the note. Those men still owe you, the men you helped—and that is why you broke. That is why your grocery will be sold out. That's why you may lose your post office."

"Oh, don't say that!" said the old man piteously.

"Well I did say it, and I never forget when a man goes against me. He gets his when I'm ready to give it to him," and with a cruel look which swept around the store meaningly Burton walked out, leaving Bender standing there and feeling like the meanest cur that lived.

"I believe Mr. Burton is angry," remarked Charlie.

"That's the truth. And the worst is, Mr. Meredith, that they never paid you for the things that raised their pay by helping them to hang on. You should have let them starve. Burton is right."

Bender found a relief to his own feelings in abusing the ungrateful operatives who now would not—maybe could not—pay their debts.

"Oh yes, Bender, some of them have paid. Betty went after them. You know that I couldn't let those mothers and little children starve."

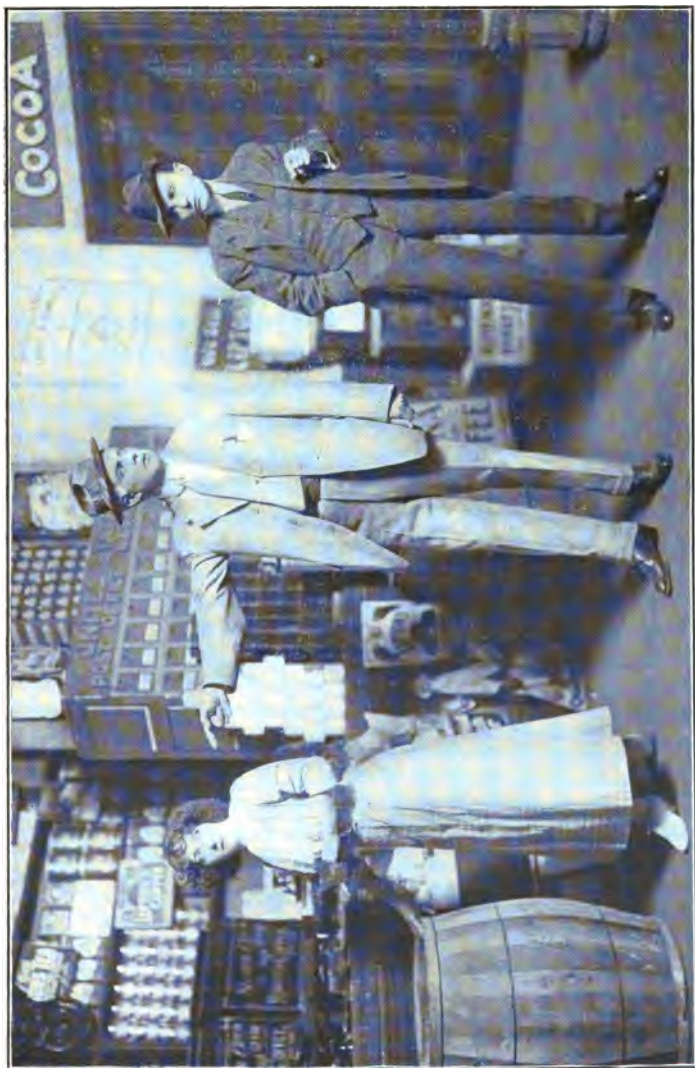
"Well, they seem willing to let you starve, when you are sold out and ruined."

"Oh now, maybe it won't be so bad as that. Betty thinks something may turn up. Betty is a smart girl."

At this instant Burton returned and stepping just inside the door said loudly:

"Bender, I want you at my office—and, Meredith, I want you to tell that girl of yours not to be hanging around my son. She has been away and knows too much. My boy is young and she knows he has a rich father. You understand?"

Burton turned in haste and as he left the store he almost ran into Philip Logan who was coming in. "Oh, how are you, Mr. Logan?" Burton said as he hastened away while Meredith stood with a dazed look on his gentle face.



BURTON ACCUSES HIS SON OF PAYING UNDUE ATTENTION TO BETTY.

CHAPTER VII

BETTY SHOWS HER METTLE

During this month many things had happened outside of the post office in Logan's Corners. Maude Burton had determined that she must win this handsome stranger whose looks and manners were such as to gain the admiration of any girl whose affections were not already anchored in a happy love match. Maude sent for new clothes, and made herself as attractive as she could. Her haughty bearing now was rarely exhibited as Logan's influence over her was good, and he showed her plainly by his own conduct when in company of the poor people about that it was not stylish garments but fine manners that he admired. He had his own reasons for attaching himself as closely as was practicable with the Burton family. He spent many wearisome hours riding about in Maude's pony cart and Claude's automobile, the only recompense being that he loved nature and the country around this place was of exceptional beauty. He was cautious and had so far managed to avoid any direct love making, yet with his keen perception he saw that it was expected of him. Still he adroitly avoided all such entanglement.

It was with the firm intention of managing

in some way to publicly make some movement that would bind him in honor, if not in heart, that Maude had Betty watched closely by a sort of vagabond who hung around the saloon, and he kept her informed of every visit Logan made to the post office.

For the reception and garden fête, Maude had had a stunning gown of delicate silk mull sent from New York, with all the concomittants necessary for an elegant outfit which should throw every other dress to be found or purchased into the shade. But she, who was generally so vain of her beautiful clothes, refused to give the least hint of what she was going to wear, even to the famous Mrs. Henderface, who had confided to Maude that she was going to wear baby blue. And now the great event was to take place the next day, and Maude had intentionally failed to send an invitation to Betty and her father.

Betty would not have been a woman had she not heard of the proposed party, and her little heart swelled as the hours passed without bringing an invitation to them.

This last month had been a hard one on Betty in more ways than one. She was not too blind to see that her beloved father would never be the same as he had been before the accident. She had blamed Logan bitterly for having been so cowardly as to fear a thunderstorm, as she could not know that the real reason for that assertion on the part of Logan had been but a pretext to get Claude away, so that the poor little hunted

creature could be free to go on to New York as she had intended.

Life was now a serious problem to Betty. She must now remain at home to care for her father, and by her tenderness and love endeavor to repay him for the long desertion. Her absorbing ambition for celebrity and fame had faded completely from her mind as the new duties and trials crowded in, and she also somehow imagined that Phil, as Logan had begged her to call him, at least when they were alone, deplored the years she had spent upon the stage. She knew that she had been and always would be the same honest, true hearted, and pure hearted girl that she had ever been, but how could she tell him that, and how show him that she was all that a good girl should be? She was so sensitive that in her conversation she felt rather than saw him wince as she used the words of vigorous meaning in common usage among the actors and actresses she had known. They meant no harm, and were but the "coin of the realm" to express themselves more forcibly, but she felt to the inmost fibres of her being that each such word uttered by her was like a pin prick to Logan. It hurt her worse than it did him, and in a few days a great change was noticeable in her conversation. Phil liked the change but had never alluded to it.

Little Betty did not know it herself, but she loved the stranger who had so kindly assisted her on that memorable morning. Her lovely color came rushing to her cheeks whenever she thought of him, only to fade away again as she

remembered the whole of the events. Her feelings were a mingling of shame and despair as she thought of her delinquencies of speech and her hidden love for the man of all the men she had seen and known, whose good opinion she craved.

Every hour brought some new duty or labor, and Betty was, as the French say, "in four places at once." Betty was always neat and dainty in her dress and ways, but it put her to the greatest trouble of her life to keep up that appearance, being as she now was, clerk in the store, assistant postmistress, and the servant in the house. But she toiled as well as she could, and no one but herself could have found fault with the trim and exquisitely pretty figure she made. Her simple white dress with the long checked apron that she wore when at work and the curls that clustered about her face seemed very attractive to at least one, and that one was Phil Logan. He had his own motives for keeping his sentiments to himself on that subject, but he noticed everything that belonged to Betty with a searching eye and found her altogether delightful with that piquant little face under its shock of curls.

Logan had heard the outrageous insult which Burton had thrown at Betty's father and her, for she had stepped into the store at the moment when the words had been said. Betty went very white and gasped for breath, then rallied and said, approaching her father, who stood with his hand to his head in a hesitating way:

"Come, Daddy, I want you to come in now and

put on your new suit and a clean shirt. You have an engagement with your old comrades at the G. A. R. hall you know. Come on."

Betty patted his hand and led him to the door, and kissed him tenderly as he passed through, while she closed it after him and stood by it with a most dejected air, brushing her eyes furtively a couple of times. She looked so small and so girlish and wretched that Phil felt his heart swell with tenderness, but he could say nothing for Luke and Charlie were sitting there. Charlie it was who had a gleam of sense and said: "Come on down to the station. Somebody might want to leave the town and got locked in the station, and maybe some one is hurt. Them automobiles is next door to the—ahem, for doing stunts."

Luke seized his basket of groceries and they both hastened out, as Charlie always really felt that all his prognostications of evil were sure to come to pass, and Luke had a fear that Betty was going to ask him if he had paid for the things he had. But Betty was not thinking of anything now but the awful thing Burton had said and wondering how much of it Logan believed. He did not leave her long in doubt as he advanced to her, saying frankly:

"I want to compliment you, little woman."

"I am not a little woman and I don't want to be complimented," said Betty, bravely fighting against a desire to go out under the bushes and weep her very heart out. Phil understood and said laughingly:

"Well, don't take it out on me. I didn't do anything."

"Oh, how I would like to tell him what I think!"

"Remember, a soft answer turneth away wrath," laughed Logan.

"Yes, I know," replied Betty with a little of the old leaven, "but a can of tomatoes thrown at his head would have made me feel much better."

"Remember your Sunday school lesson, of 'return good for evil!'"

"Say, are you a preacher—or what? You've got me guessing as well as everybody else. Say, how long are you going to stay?"

"Until I find my lost health."

"Hum, well, not wishing you any hard luck, I hope you won't have any great success in finding it."

"Why?" said he with such a light in his eyes that Betty's girlish reserve became alert and she replied lightly:

"You are having a good effect on me."

"Am I? I am glad that I am doing some good."

"You were pretty sick when you came, weren't you?"

"Yes, I think I was. But every day sees me a little better."

"You arrived the day I did, only on different cars."

"Yes, and I was your maid—pink—ah—er—wig."

"Forget them, please."

"I wish I could. You looked fine, with the gold shoes. Have you kept them? I hope so."

"My mind is relieved—you are no preacher," said Betty demurely but with a little bit of a smile at the corners of her mouth.

"That was four weeks ago. I feel as if I had known you for years."

"Hum, and you say you were pretty sick when you arrived——"

"Yes; that's the second time you have asked me that. Why?"

"That's the day poor Daddy was hurt."

"Yes, that very same day."

"Dad weighs 140 pounds and you lifted him and carried him to the station as though he were only a baby. It is curious."

"Well, why?"

"Sick men can't lift loads like that."

"It was the excitement that gave me strength. You are a very suspicious little girl."

"And you are a very strong invalid," said Betty stoutly.

"I am still very far from being a well man," and here he thought a cough would clench the argument and tried it, but it did not deceive Betty who was the very incarnation of honesty in everything, so she said impatiently:

"Now cut out that correct imitation of a man about to die. I don't know what your game is and I don't care. I believe you are all right, and I hope it lasts a long time around here, for I am pretty tired of these small town folk—they are not on the level—but you somehow seem to be

able to give me the courage to fight it out. I must do it for Daddy's sake. I feel as though I have been to blame for half Daddy's troubles, and that if I had remained here instead of hunting what I was never intended to get—fame—and helped him he would not have got so far behind. Why I have been trying to collect money owing to him about here—over two thousand dollars in small lots, and I have got nothing but abuse, scarcely. I wish I had stayed home—and I never would have gone if it had not been for my stepmother. I feel sorry for her now, for I guess she was sick and probably I wasn't as respectful as I might have been to her—anyway I went, and wish I hadn't."

"I am glad you feel that way," said Phil, who in the sweet presence was fast forgetting his resolution, and that was not to admit his love for the bright little creature until—"but that is his secret."

"But, tell me what is this I heard, that the post office might be taken away from Daddy?"

"Betty, I will tell you frankly, for it is better that you should hear it from me than from any one else. Before you came back, letters were missed, and many checks from Mr. Burton's letter box, and your father's financial difficulties and his great need of money, put together with that fact, have made people talk, as they always do in a small town where everybody thinks it his business to regulate his neighbor's affairs. This suspicion must be cleared away or they will put

in a new postmaster and the Government will prosecute unless the loss is made good."

Betty's face went so white and wan at this that Logan wished with all his heart that he could take the little figure in his arms and comfort her and tell her that he was going to try to find the truth about this matter. Betty at last found voice and said in hushed tones such as we use when speaking of the dead:

"They don't think that Daddy would steal. That good old man who fought, and gave his arm, and almost his life for his country. Oh, they can't think that!"

"They will think it until we discover the real thief."

"Well, they will find the real thief. They must. Daddy must not know they suspect him. Why, Mr. Logan, it would kill him."

"You brave, loyal little soul," said Phil to himself, but aloud he only said: "Mr. Burton has written to Washington and made charges against the loss of his money and they, of course, will investigate."

"Oh well, then that is all right. That is all we want. They can soon prove Daddy is innocent, can't they?"

"They will have to catch the thief before your Daddy is exonerated—because he is responsible."

"I don't understand it. Who can it be? *You know* it couldn't be Dad, you know that, don't you? Of course you know that, don't you?"

"I am a stranger here, and don't know much about it. But, Betty, when does your father

expect to pay off that judgment against the place here?"

"I don't know. He has only a few days. I hoped to find a way but I am not sure. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I was just curious and anxious that he should save it." Then he muttered to himself, "I hope I am wrong, but it is the only way he can get the money. I must get this letter in the mail bag before it arrives here," and saying the last sentence aloud he held up a letter while Betty said with a poor and feeble little assumption of carelessness:

"You did not get your letter from your sweetheart this morning?"

"No but I will, and she has sent me her picture."

"Can I see it?" asked Betty faintly.

"Sure, when it comes."

Betty's pain and anguish were so great that she said, as though the last words she would have spoken were wrung from her:

"I'll bet she is rich and stuck up."

"What's that?" asked Phil in surprise.

"Oh, I meant—meant—somebody else. I was talking to myself. Did you see Miss Burton this morning?"

"No, why?"

"Oh," returned Betty, still smarting under the wound, "she is late primping. I suppose she will be here."

"What makes you think that?" said Phil se-

cretly amused, for he read that honest little soul like an open book.

"Because, she has never missed you by over ten minutes in the last two weeks. Asks for her mail, and she never gets any letters. Why don't you write her one—she would die of heart disease."

"Shall I?" asked Phil, looking into the lovely eyes with a glance that she could not endure and her own drooped till the lashes lay upon her blushing cheeks. But in reply she breathed more than said "No".

"What, what, Betty?"

"I—I mean it is none of my business."

The door opened and Betty's father, spick and span, came into the room saying:

"I am all ready, daughter. Am I all right?"

"Just one moment," she replied, brushing an imaginary speck of dust from his sleeve. Then she rearranged his necktie, and brushed his hat, and as a final touch of loving service she wiped off his shoes, and then held up her rosy lips for the kiss that always repaid her. Meredith turned to Logan saying:

"Mr. Logan, she is a good daughter to me. I may have missed some of the good things of this world but so long as I have my Betty the rest may go, unwept, unhonored and unsung."

"Have a good time, Daddy. I'll go with you to the corner," and with a sweet and protecting love as well as a genuine pride in her father she led him out to the corner of the narrow street saying as they went that she could not understand

why, having all out doors to make streets of in all the small towns, the streets were as narrow as though the ground were worth a million dollars a foot.

Logan looked after the two as they went, thinking:

"The dear, bright little thing. She can't understand just why I am here. I wonder if it will make any difference if she does learn. I wish I could tell her how much she is to me. I wonder if she does care anything for me or is it because I appear different from the men about here. I can't tell her now, and after she does learn she may despise me with her honest directness. I am in a bad box."

At this stage of his meditations Betty came back and entering the place closed the door behind her, saying, with a great show of mystery: "Oh, what do you think I've got for you, a great surprise."

"What is it?" said Phil smiling, as Betty spoke the time honored formula of open your mouth and shut your eyes, and Phil declared his readiness to receive the "surprise" when Betty with a mischievous look opened the door again to admit Maude, while Phil, disappointed, he scarcely knew why, said in an undertone, "Is that all?"

Betty took her place behind the desk and sorted over the letters, muttering to herself as she watched Maude, "She is after him again. Oh, I don't know why you are hanging around—nobody wants you."

"Please, miss, I am waiting for my mail," said Maude haughtily.

"There he is," said Betty, pointing to Logan.

"Dear me," said Maude, advancing to Phil, "do you know I had not the slightest idea that you were here."

"No, you must have thought he was in Alaska picking bananas. Cat!" and as Maude looked about for the cat, Betty pretended to drive an imaginary cat away from the cheese, which amused Logan who was at that very moment leaning his elbow on the glass. He stepped away, suddenly asking her if she meant him.

"No, I said cat and meant cat. C-a-t, cat. That's the kind of a cat I meant."

"Oh," said Maude, "what does she mean?"

Logan caught sight of the twinkle in Betty's eyes and laughed.

"Did you get my invitation to the party?" asked Maude of Logan. "You will be there I trust?"

"Of course I will," replied Phil, "but I have a couple of friends—or I may have——"

"Let me give you a couple of cards. Your friends will always be mine," and Maude gave him two invitations in their sumptuous envelopes.

"It looks rather threatening to-day, but I hope the weather will be fine to-morrow," said Phil politely.

"I hope it rains," muttered Betty.

"What did you say, Miss Meredith?" asked Phil, who had heard her perfectly.

"We are out of raisins," she said.

"All the best people are coming—such as they

are. Of course you understand we are compelled to live here on account of father's mills. We give the parties and let the natives come and have a good time. Father says it is 'jollyng them' and they work harder and don't ask an increase of pay."

"Very clever, I am sure."

"Of course I cannot enjoy their society but you will be there and I want you to keep me away from the crowd as much as possible. I can't stand those people of the mills."

Betty held a lamp chimney in her hands as Maude said this with such an air of proprietorship, and suddenly the little fingers lost their strength and the glass crashed to the floor, Maude screamed and leaned toward Phil as though she were about to faint, but he was looking at the little white face, and nerveless hands. Maude had called "Mr. Logan" but as he had not rushed to her she caught herself before falling, while Betty said to Phil, "Take her out before I throw the whole lamp at her."

"Remember the lesson, if she strikes you on the left cheek turn the right one to her."

"If she strikes me there will be a funeral instead of a party at her house. Keep me away from them. Ha——"

Claude opened the door and hastily entered the place, drawing Maude to one side, and saying in a hoarse whisper:

"Hello, sister. Say, I want you—got any money, I'm broke."

"You know I gave you all I had yesterday," replied Maude.

"It isn't enough. I've got to have nearly five hundred to-day."

"What is it now, gambling?"

"No," replied Claude, lighting a fresh cigarette, "it is that girl thing again."

"You mean the girl that claims that you promised you'd marry her?"

"Not so loud. You didn't tell Dad, did you? I'd be in a ~~bit~~ of a scrape if you did."

"You know I didn't."

"Well, this is the third letter I got. She says the kid is sick, and a lot of rot, and if she don't get it to-day she'll write to the postmaster to find father and tell him——"

"What are you going to do?" asked Maude distressed beyond words, for she loved this graceless scamp with a wonderful affection when one considers how he repaid her.

"I'll do something, and ~~be~~ desperate too. I got to have it. I thought the girl and the kid both had died—hello, Betty."

"How do you do, Mr. Burton?" she replied coldly.

"That's right, rub it in. Say, coming to the party?"

"No, I haven't been invited."

"Say, Sis, you know Betty, I mean Miss Meredith."

"No, not very well. I was such a little girl when she worked in father's mills, and father never allowed me to associate with the help."

"No, the help would have killed her, the stuck up little thing," said Betty.

"Well I remember the day, Sis, when you fell in the lake and was drowning, when Betty jumped in and pulled you out."

"Yes, you should have shown your brotherly love and rescued me."

"I suppose I should but I had on a new suit and didn't want to spoil it—besides Betty could swim, better than I. Betty, do you remember the dive you used to make off the mill shed? Say, Mr. Logan, she could dive forty feet and bring up a rock."

"I don't care to talk of such foolish things now," said Maude, angry and disturbed. She added:

"I think father paid her for it."

"Yes, he did," said Betty, her words sounding like hail against the glass, "he allowed me some extra work at nights at the factory. I was amply repaid for so small a favor."

Claude fairly doubled up with laughter, as he said that was a knock in earnest. Maude flushed angrily, and looked so sharply at her brother that he concluded that he must be on his best behavior if he would obtain the five hundred dollars. It mattered little to him how or where she obtained it only so he could have it.

There was a long whistle from the train that was due in five minutes, and Logan said to Betty, "There is the train coming, and I will go down for the mail as your father cannot be there in time and I don't depend too much on Luke."

"Oh, Luke is honest," said Betty.

"I don't doubt that," Logan replied, "but I do doubt his sense of duty. If he went he would probably stop to eat his supper before he came back to the Corners."

"I shall be very much obliged if you will bring it," said Betty, but without much enthusiasm, for she instantly foresaw that Maude would find some excuse to keep him company. And she was right for Maude said, in what was meant to be a careless tone:

"I am going that way, Phil; I beg your pardon, I mean Mr. Logan," she finished in apparent confusion at her error.

Logan took the bag which was to go out, and as he reached the door Maude stood ready to take his arm. So, with a wry face, and a mail sack doubled up under one arm and a pretty girl hanging to the other he was most uncomfortable.

Betty saw them go, and watched Maude's air of proprietorship, and then returning she leaned her head against the cool marble of the soda water fountain, saying to herself with a half sob:

"It is hell to be poor!"

Claude had watched the couple as they walked along and drew his own conclusions, and while Betty conscientiously washed her mouth out and then held it shut as a punishment for the little cry of despair that had escaped her, Claude had stood by the door. Then he returned to where Betty was standing, and he became the butt of her anger and misery. He began the conversation by saying:

"Say; my sister is going to get that guy. That's clear."

"Oh, you think so?" returned Betty, busying herself with the glasses.

"Ah, he couldn't get away from her with a ninety horse power racer, and she in her pony cart."

"Think so?" again said Betty, but her lips were drawn close and her eyes flashed, but as she was turned the other way he could not see the danger signals, and continued stupidly:

"And, what makes it a cinch is the Governor, for he likes Logan. He thinks I'm no good and so wants to find a son-in-law with brains, and anybody that isn't stone blind must give that chap credit for having brains. Why he has showed the Governor a dozen ways where he could improve on the works, and get more work out of the men with less grumbling, and he says it is a good policy to make the men think they are having it easier. Well, they would be having it easier in a way——"

"I know something about the easy ways of working in that mill. I worked there one year, till I wonder how I am alive now. It is awful on the children and women, for the work is too hard on them,—and yet it is such puttering work that men won't do it. Oh, I do wish it could be made a little easier on the women and children."

"When I come into the property I'll see about that very thing," said Claude grandly, lighting another cigarette and throwing away the half

smoked one as usual. Betty turned up her nose saying:

"Say, do you think I like that nasty smell in this place. If you must smoke stand in the doorway and leave it open, or better yet, stand outside."

"But, I really mean it, Betty, when the Governor croaks I'll have everything——"

"You beast!" said little Betty, fairly blazing in her righteous anger. "Your father will outlive you years. He is a healthy man who has never wasted his health by smoking those horrible cigarettes. You will never take his place—you are not capable anyhow. Your father don't like me and there is no love lost between us, but I am obliged to respect him as a man who works and does something in this world, while—you—Oh, I have no patience with such useless creatures as you are."

"I don't think you do me justice, Betty."

"I couldn't, for I'm not the man who destroys useless animals, but if I were—well I know one that would be drowned in a hurry and his name would be Claude Burton."

Claude scarcely appeared to understand the bitterness of this arraignment of his foibles and the denunciation of his heartless speech about his father's death, and continued his train of thought as though it had not been interrupted by Betty's outburst. He said:

"And I have my suspicions that this party is going to be the announcement of the engagement."

A glass fell from Betty's nerveless fingers and crashed on the floor while she managed to say in a careless voice: "Think so?" To herself she muttered: "If this sort of thing keeps up there'll be a famine in glass around here."

"I don't think he has asked her. That's the trouble, and that's why she is so cross, and so dead set after him. But she will make him speak—he is a great fellow—everybody likes him—but I'm bothered to know what he wants around this place. There is some kind of mystery—and—I'd feel better if I knew what it is."

The last few words were spoken in so low a tone that Betty, being some fifteen feet from where he stood, could not hear them. She replied demurely: "He is here for his health."

"Say, that health business don't listen good to me. He was down at the blacksmith's the other day and put on the gloves with him, and he just simply chased the blacksmith out of the shop. I can't get that guy right," and he looked as though he meant it and had some good reason for wishing to do so. Betty took up the defence of the absent one, saying:

"I've heard that consumptives—in the early stages—are very strong—like a spark on the black log that brightens up bigger than before and then goes out," and she paled as the thought of what the "going out" meant to her. Now, she suddenly knew her own secret. She loved this stranger who had come into her life and had filled so large a place before she had realized it. And was she now to let Maude Burton come

between her and this man simply because she was rich and Betty poor? She almost said the prohibited word again. She wanted to be alone, and she wanted to hear all that this foolish cad might say, so she said quietly and in a voice from which all the gay lightness had gone:

"Well, that seems very strange."

Claude had exhausted the subject for the moment and drew near his father's letter box, and looked at it closely, asking at the same time if there were any letters for his father.

"I think not," replied Betty, feeling somehow that she had no right to tell anything relating to Burton's mail to Claude. If those presentiments were heeded more often many troubles might be warded off, so she stood in such a way that Claude could not approach the box, which was locked and to which no one was supposed to have a key but Mr. Burton himself.

"Is there any for me?" said he rather uneasily, and to which question she responded:

"Yes."

"Well, give it to me," and then struck by something in her face he drew back growing a ghastly white, but Betty said calmly:

"I opened the letter myself."

"You opened it, my letter?" said he, so surprised that he could say no more. "Yes; I opened it, and it was from Bessie."

"How did you know—what right had you?"

"It was sent to the Postmaster at Logan's Corners for information. Do you want to read it?"

"No," replied he, trembling from fear, but he finally asked: "Is she dead?"

"No, you wish she was, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," answered the wretch, in an angry burst.

"Well, I must say I think you are the lowest, meanest thing on the face of this earth. How can you say such awful things? You shall hear what the letter says, and maybe a spark of humanity may still exist in your opium-soaked body. Listen!" and Betty read the letter while Claude writhed in fear of the consequences to him should his father learn the contents. "It is addressed to the Postmaster as you may see. 'Please give me information as to the whereabouts of Claude Burton. His father is a big man in your town. I am the mother of his little baby, and I am sick and can't last long. They took the baby away from me and sent it to a home. I was too sick to care for it. I don't care about myself, but tell him for God's sake to take care of our little boy, three months old today. Don't tell his father, for it might do him harm as he is dependent on his father, just let him know about the baby. God bless you for your favor, Bessie. He knows where I am.'"

This pitiful letter was too much for Betty's tender heart and she gave way to tears for a moment while Claude said, heartlessly:

"She'll die anyway and I can't help it. I wasn't to blame for that. As to the kid, I'll look out for it, for it is mine all right, but I've got to get some money. Dad's got to give me some.

He gives me automobiles, clothes, everything but money. He thinks I am a damned fool and don't know how to use it."

"Surely God will not let such a crime as this go unpunished. I pity that poor girl, and think of that little baby in a pauper's home and you—here in luxury, and only yesterday you said you wanted to marry me. How low some men can be I have learned to-day."

"Oh stop, ~~stop it~~. I'm nearly crazy now. You could make something of me if you only would. You've got brains and I haven't."

"You can make something of that poor girl whose life you have ruined. As to me, I am not in the class of women who marry a miserable drug fiend or drunkard thinking that leopards can change their spots. What you have got to think of is the poor little baby that you brought into this world."

"I can't do anything till I get money," replied Claude doggedly and he stood there, in the attitude of a recalcitrant schoolboy who believes himself abused. Betty replied, angrily:

"The boy is yours and you must look after him. If I had the money I'd send it myself—he is among strangers, and perhaps mistreated. A little baby——"

"You won't tell father, will you? You will stick by me and I'll——"

This sentence was never finished for there was a crash on the floor, as Logan had dropped the mail bag and left the place, but he had heard the last sentence uttered by Betty in her scornful

words and the cowardly reply of Claude which broke upon what Betty was saying.

"I'll stick by you for the woman and the baby."

Claude turned to go, saying to himself: "If I can get some money to-night I'll blow this place and go to Europe."

Phil Logan looked as he would when he was placed in his coffin as he left the place staggering. He believed from the two sentences that he had heard that Betty was Claude's wife and that they had been married clandestinely, and were trying to keep the fact a secret from the elder Burton.

Logan went out of the town and struck into the woods where he flung himself on the ground and tried to solve this mystery, but no matter what he said to himself or how hard he tried to overcome the strange and poignant anguish it was stronger than he, and he groaned aloud. "Never again," said he, "will I believe in the truth of any woman. I have looked into those limpid eyes and thought I saw but truth and honor, and here she has been playing with us all. She must have come from bad stock, and now I can begin to believe in the guilt of her father. Oh, my God, how I have been deceived. But, I cannot leave here now. I was sent to unravel this mystery and must remain until I shall have done so."

While Logan was going through the greatest anguish of his life in the belief that little Betty had so deceived him, Mr. Burton was striding to the post office in an angry frame of mind. He

had just had a stormy interview with Maude, who asked for a thousand dollars. He had given her so much for the expenses of this party that he felt that it was imposing on his good nature for her to ask him for more, and finally he said to her, so suddenly that she had not been able to foresee his question and thus stammered over her reply:

"There is something more under your constantly increasing demands for money," he said, "and I am growing tired of it. Is this for Claude? Tell me?"

"I—ah—oh, no—but——"

"Enough! I know now where all your money goes. I have known for a long time what a drain he has been upon his poor sick mother, but I thought you too clever, as well as too selfish to give him your money. No, you will get no thousand dollars, nor one hundred dollars. I shall hereafter give you no money allowance, but you shall have all that you require as my daughter. But I draw the line upon that cigarette fiend and cocaine eater. I mean it. You can go on and have your party to-morrow but no more money."

After this Burton was naturally in no frame of mind to be lenient with Claude, and when he entered the post office and found Claude there anger got the better of him and he said, as he strode forward:

"What are you doing here?" and taking no notice of Betty.

"I came for my mail," replied Claude tremb-

ling, for he foresaw a bad quarter of an hour for himself.

"You are lying and you know it. You are hanging around after this girl. Now, I warn you for the last time, go outside and wait for me."

Claude slunk out like a whipped cur and waited for his father in no enviable frame of mind. Burton went to his private box, unlocked it and took out two or three letters, and then turned to Betty, saying, "Is the afternoon mail in?"

"No, sir," replied Betty, not knowing that Logan had been there and seen her showing Claude the letter from Bessie and then gone away unseen. "That is, father has not brought it up from the station," and she forgot in her trepidation that Phil had offered to bring it. Burton looked at her with marked disapproval and said brutally:

"No, he has no time to attend to the duties of his office, but he has time to burn with that G. A. R. meeting. What good are they to him. They all owe him money."

"But he enjoys it. Old comrades meet and talk over old times."

"Yes; but that doesn't pay his debts, and it don't take care of the U. S. mail, which he is paid to do. We pay to have these things done right."

"You should be a little easy with him just now. In the first place he is an old soldier and in the next, your son hurt him badly and he has

not yet entirely recovered from the injury," said Betty stoutly.

"If he had had any sense he would have stayed at home and built up a business instead of going to the war and get an arm shot off. No one cares about that now. It is money. If he had that, why he need not care for any office. He could be independent."

"Well," replied Betty with spirit, "some one had to go to the war and fight for the country. Perhaps you would not have what you have in money if he and others had not fought to save our country. He was fighting while you were piling up a fortune. I should think you would be kinder to an old soldier."

Without knowing it Betty had touched upon a tender spot in Burton's armor, as he had made the greater part of his fortune on contracts to furnish the army with certain goods, which were falsified in quality and in numbers also. He had had a partner in a high position who obtained the contracts for him and he had furnished goods so inferior in quality that the soldiers suffered for his iniquity, and the quantity was also stated to be thousands in excess of the actual number furnished. The partner strangely enough was found out and had to fly to California and from there to Oregon, where his faithful young wife accompanied him, and where her child was born in a shed so leaky that her sister was obliged to hold an umbrella over the newly made mother. And, this partner was hounded by an unscrupulous man who forced poor Jennie to give him the

very wedding ring from her finger with her other jewelry, to save him from capture. And then the war was over and the man died who had persecuted them and the young husband who had lent his name and position to further Burton's plans, perhaps not knowing at the outset the whole of the dishonest and ignoble fraud, found himself free. He left Burton alone, not wishing to be led into another such trap. He went to the northern part of New York state and settled there, and became a power in the political world. It would surprise many persons if the name of this man were to be told. Burton came out without a scratch, so to speak, and continued along in the old way. He had been made rich, as fortunes were then, and ever since he had been adding to his wealth, but after all what had he?

As Jack London says, "a man can't sleep in more than one bed at a time," and Burton had nothing to call real wealth. A poor sick wife, who never was a companion to him, as he was a man who kept his own counsel too well to even let his wife know his business. It was, or should be, her duty to maintain his house in good style, to bring up their two children. Claude was lost so far as his character and his health was concerned, and Maude was selfish to the heart's core. She treated her mother kindly, and as has been said before, loved her worthless brother, but she cared nothing for her father, as they were too similar in character. There never had been any of the real accord that should exist in family life in theirs. Each one was for himself.

The mother was a good woman, but weak in her government of her two children, but her worship was given to her son. She was friendly with Maude, and admired her handsome presence, but of the sweet union and companionship that should exist between a mother and daughter she had no idea. And now she was ill with an incurable ailment that must end her life soon, and she brooded over her fate. Her husband rarely saw her, and when he did about all that he said was to inquire how she felt, and her son never went near her save when he wanted money. He had persuaded her to give up her last penny, always, and at last he took possession of one of her rings. What he did with all the money that he obtained from his mother and sister even he could not tell.

CHAPTER VIII

BETTY DEFENDS HER FATHER

While Betty had been standing, waiting for Burton to make his next move, for her keen wits perceived that he had not said all he intended, the door opened and her father came in. He was far brighter than he had seemed, and said, happily, as he entered, and before he had noticed Burton there:

"Well, daughter, we just had the best time. They all told stories of how we swapped tobacco across the line at Chattanooga at night, and about the moonlight battle. It was at the battle that we fought next morning that I lose my arm."

Burton stepped forward saying brutally:

"You have still one arm left, and you are drawing a salary to attend to my mail. No wonder you lose mail matter—and no wonder they are going to remove you——"

"Stop Mr. Burton, you should not insult my father. Go in Daddy and change your clothes," and Betty fairly pushed her father into the next room. His dulled faculties had not seized the full import of Burton's words. As soon as he had closed the door Betty turned to Burton saying:

"Now, say what you like to me. I am here."

Burton looked at the trim little figure and the resolute face, resolute in protecting her father, and a sharp pang went through him as he contrasted this girl with his own children. He knew that they cared nothing for him save for what they could get from him, and here was a slip of a girl ready to die if need be to protect her father. It did not occur to him to think that perhaps it was the fault of the father. Burton was uncomfortable and said:

"Why is the mail bag not opened? I can't wait for the last delivery. I expect very important letters and forsooth must wait until tomorrow because the G. A. R. has a meeting. Rot!"

"The way you treat the soldier that bled and almost died for you that you might become wealthy is a shame. It is a wonder that the stars and stripes don't fade in shame when you look at them."

"You are a very saucy and impudent girl, and I have reported the manner in which this post office is conducted to the Government. I hope soon to be rid of all of you, and I'll put the post office in my new building. We shall then have the proper service, and not have our letters held up or stolen."

"I understand," said Betty, "that you are trying to rent the second floor of your building to the G. A. R. I'll tell them how much you think of the old soldiers."

"I don't care a pea straw about that. What I

want to impress upon you is that I want you to let my boy alone. You know that he has a rich father, and also that he is weak. Don't you try to marry him, for in such a case I will not give him a dollar. Remember that. Thank goodness, whatever may be his faults, women have never been his weakness. Now, remember what I tell you. Let my boy alone," and as he said these outrageous words he struck his clenched fist upon the counter to the imminent danger of a basket of eggs and a glass case containing cheese. Betty, however angry she felt, did not reply to the unmerited insult, but simply told Burton to look out for the eggs and the cheese, and appeared more anxious about their safety than troubled by his unmanly attack.

After this remarkable ebullition of temper Burton strode out. He always strode. He would have considered any ordinary walk a lessening of his dignity. But Betty was not worried by his dignified manner although angered by his insinuations regarding his son, whom she despised so heartily.

Before the poor girl could really command herself, her father returned to the store, having changed his army garments for the more prosaic ones appertaining to his business. He had a long white apron on, which, however, did not hide the medal won by him for bravery on the battlefield, worn on his left breast. He soon felt that something was amiss, and asked her:

"What is it, daughter. What did Mr. Burton mean about the post office. I never could get him

to look at that letter of mine from McKinley. I showed it to the boys at the campfire and I know it kind of made them jealous. They were all good soldiers, yes, every one of them, but not one had a letter from McKinley."

"Never mind that just now, Daddy," said Betty, looking at his gentle and benign face, while the truth seemed to strike her like a blow, and she realized that he would never really be himself again. That cruel blow which had thrown him down to strike upon his head with such force had left his brain benumbed to such an extent that he would never be his own clear-minded self again. "I must learn to be more capable," thought the girl, while her tenderness for her father grew greater with each new evidence of his failing intellect. He was not old enough to be said to be in a state of senility. His mental power had been as good as ever when this had happened him, and now, all she could do was to keep him as much as possible from meeting men who had any influence which might be used against him. Betty opened a ponderous book and with a deep wrinkle between her brows she said:

"Come here, Daddy. I have been trying, with the help of dear old Cap, to straighten out your books. Do you know that you have trusted three times the amount of your cash receipts?"

"Is that so, daughter?" replied he, with an ineffably sweet smile, which brought an added pang to the loyal little heart.

"Yes, Daddy, and we owe an awful lot of

money. I can't figure out where we are to pull out. Now, here is one account running for two years and not a penny paid. Here it is. Jefferson Selby."

"Well, you know, daughter, he was a Confederate soldier, and came North and took sick, and I just let it run along. You see, he— Well, I wore the blue and he wore the gray. We both thought we were right, and he was a fighter. Oh, yes; he was a credit to his side, and I liked him. Say, daughter, when I was wounded up there at Chattanooga, the time I lost my arm, he carried me out of the road and laid me under a tree, so the cavalry, as they rode by, wouldn't trample me to death. Now, I couldn't refuse an old soldier, could I, dear?"

"You bet you couldn't, Daddy, but it is funny how two Southern soldiers saved you. You did the right thing. God bless the dear old blue, and I'll pray tonight that your old Confederate comrade gets well. No, I don't exactly mean pray, but I will send him on invisible wings the thoughts that will make him well again. And he can have all he wants from this little store—as long as we have anything," she added under her breath. "But, where is he?"

"Why, didn't you understand? It is Cap, you know now, but don't mention it. It might hurt his feelings if it got out."

"Daddy, you are a saint, and this is your halo," she said, touching his silvery hair. "But, this won't do. I must get the mail out."

Betty then, with a very businesslike air,

which sat rather incongruously on her curly head, began to sort out the letters. She put the different letters in the boxes belonging to the different owners, and after a breathless pause, she said: "Daddy, there is one for me! Why, it is from the Burtons for Miss Meredith and her father. Well, well, wonders will never cease."

"You see, daughter, that Mr. Burton likes us after all."

"I wonder what made her change her mind? That is strange. Hurry, Daddy, and help me with the letters before that group of scandal mongers, old cats and hens, will reach here. They will have more fault to find than before, and goodness knows the anvil chorus has been working overtime lately."

"Here are some more big letters for Mr. Burton. We must be very careful of them, for he is always saying that I am old and not capable of handling his important mail. He says he has written to Washington to have me removed."

"Oh, don't think about that, Daddy. Some folks always have to do the kicking, and he is a born kicker."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, but one of the boys at the campfire this afternoon told me that they had heard that Burton said that if any more of his letters went wrong, I would be accused of dishonesty. I told him I didn't believe any such thing."

"Oh, they were only joking and think it is cunning to scare folks." But Betty turned her head as she made this disclaimer.

"Now, here is Mr. Burton's box, and I am sure I put them in there, and no one but he himself can open it, but I am so forgetful lately. But I am sure I always put his letters inside his box. It is kind of like second nature to do it when you've done it so long."

"All right, Daddy, don't think about it now."

"Do you know, daughter, that it would about kill me if any one thought I was dishonest."

"No one could think that who knows you, Daddy, no one," said the poor girl, almost at the limit of her endurance.

This had been a hard day for Betty, and she felt that, strong as she was, she would either have to faint like another girl, or scream, or—fight. Her preference was certainly in favor of the fight. But her father continued in his line of thought in spite of her assurances that nobody could possibly think him guilty of any wrong. Finally, he said: "If they should write to Washington and tell them to take the office from me, I could show them my letter from McKinley, and that would prove that I was honest and a good soldier."

"It most positively would, Daddy."

"Betty, I want to say this, and now is a good time to say it, since we are on the subject: If any thing should happen to me—you know how ap one is to get hurt and sick and the like—well when I am called for the last TAPS—you know the old soldier, when he is gone—buried, you know—they play the TAPS, and it means 'good night, good night, sleep well, sleep well.' Well

after taps, I want you to have that letter framed and laid on my coffin, so that all who are there may read it, and then you keep it to show that your old daddy was something in the world."

This was just the last straw for poor little Betty and she threw herself on her father's breast and wept with deep sobs that seemed as though they would tear her soul from her body. It was such a tempest of grief as her father had never seen, and he could only hold her to him and kiss her tenderly, and let her weep till the first passion had worn itself out. She sobbed out:

"Oh, Daddy, don't talk like that, I can't stand it. I can't."

"I didn't mean to make you feel so bad. Betty, listen, what so many persons call death does not mean something too awful to speak of, but just a change——"

"Oh, father, and do you know, too, then we will be so happy together, talking about this beautiful new thing that has brought me so much strength and light in dark places. Now, I know why you have been so sweet in all things and never held enmity towards those who have treated you so badly. Nothing but good can come to you because you are one with the source of all good. If you had asked me a week ago to say this I should not have known how to say it, but somehow it has all become clear to me lately."

"Why, dear, I have always taught you this, but I imagined you too young to understand it. Well, now, we know everything is good and

everything will be right, and if my time comes to pass onward before yours you are not to weep, but rejoice, because—you know.”

The little figure, still shaken by deep sobs, rested against her father's breast when the door opened and Logan came in. He had passed through a way of thornes and sorrow since he left that little place, and thought he had fully renounced all hope of winning this dear girl, but the pathetic little tear-stained face was too much for his philosophy, and his heart gave a great throb of pain. Until now he had not seen the sweetest part of her nature, as she had grown so accustomed to defending herself at all points during her four years away that she was always on the defensive, but now he saw her abandoned entirely to her grief and he had all that he could do not to go forward and forcibly take her from her father's arms. When he thought maybe she had just confessed her marriage and that he had no right, so he steeled his heart and said:

“I beg your pardon, but I didn't wish to intrude.”

“I was just talking to Betty about my letter from McKinley. Did you ever see it, Mr. Logan; it is a little mussed now, but there is his name, bless him. This is his signature,” and in a soldierly fashion he saluted the picture.

Logan felt the sincerity of the old man penetrate to the innermost fibres of his nature and he bent his head and saluted it as had the older man. He took off his hat as Meredith placed the

precious letter in his hands, and as he read it another salute followed as he said:

"It is a great honor, Mr. Meredith, and one of which any man might be proud."

"See, Betty, Mr. Logan says it is a great honor, and he knows."

At this moment Jade Bender entered the store, and Mr. Meredith said to him almost gleefully: "Jade, did I ever show you my letter from——"

"Yes, a hundred times. I'm sick of it."

Logan had made one bound and fell against Bender with such force as to almost throw him down. Jade said, angrily:

"Say, what are you doing? Can't you see?"

"I beg your pardon, I didn't see you. I have a constitutional dislike of mice, and I thought I saw one," replied Logan gravely, but Betty had looked up and saw in his eyes a merry twinkle which belied Phil's words.

"Well, for a lunger and a sick man you are awful strong," replied Bender not half satisfied with the explanation. Meredith folded the letter and replaced it and turned to help Betty wait upon customers and those who had come for their mail.

It seemed strange to Betty to see half the population of this little town come straggling in after the factory was closed and the people at leisure to inquire for letters that never came and of which they had no expectation. The men got together and talked politics and the women anything that interested them from babies to fashions.

Maude swept in, dressed beautifully and as she saw Logan she asked in her sweetest voice, "Any mail?"

Betty's bright spirits rebounded and she found strength to reply saying:

"Yes, one. It is an advertisement for a medicine to blonde the hair."

At this Sissy who had come with Luke, began to laugh and continued so long that Luke began to pound her on the back for fear she would strangle, explaining his ungallant action by telling the company at large that she had a stutter in her laugh as well as talking apparatus, and when she once got going nothing helped her but three or four hard blows on the shoulder. Maude somehow felt vexed and annoyed, thinking that perhaps Sissy was laughing at her, and turning with her haughtiest air, she said: "What are you laughing at?" but Luke hastened to say:

"Don't make her tell you, for it will be Christmas before she can get it out." At this moment Charlie received a bulky parcel, and, as he saw that everyone was interested in the fact, turned around and said to the "assemblage": "It is a song. Say, Luke, I'm learning to play this latest ballad. I'll let you learn it, too, and then you can sing it at the party tomorrow."

Luke did not appear to be very anxious to learn the song, and further argument was cut short by the arrival of Mrs. Henderface, whose arrival in any gathering was usually followed by a certain small flutter of interest, for was she not the one who could mention the names of our

"genial so and so," or simply mention a lady or gentleman as being "among those present?" She alone could describe the ladies' costumes and none but she had the power to make hateful allusions where they would hurt the worst. Nobody liked her, but all feared her, for it is so easy for one who has unlimited power to say mean things in a newspaper. This time Mrs. Henderface made signs to Luke which he obeyed by going with her to the farthest part of the room, and there they whispered while Claude sauntered in still smoking, but even paler than ordinary. Claude looked at his father's box with great curiosity, while Luke whispered to Mrs. Henderface.

The store was full, some buying things and others waiting for mail or reading the many advertising sheets that are sent broadcast all over the country with alluring advertisements in to persuade the dimes and quarters from the country folk. Luke said:

"Well, as per your instructions, I wrote to our detective agency and got Logan's record. Here it is: 'Graduated at Harvard, took two trips around the world, won the amateur boxing championship at the Washington Athletic Club. His father owns a railroad and a couple of gold mines, bears a good reputation, and his occupation——'"

"Yes," Mrs. Henderface asked, breathlessly.

"His occupation is unknown."

"Then he can't be the man that is stealing the mail."

"Naw! But it looks bad for Meredith. I can't find a soul to fasten it on but him."

"And is he the only one around here that owes money?" she asked, unblushingly forgetful of the long and long-standing account against herself.

"Yes," said Luke, equally forgetful of his mother's account. "And he has a judgment against him. It looks bad."

Bender had taken up a newspaper and was reading, but he suddenly turned his wrinkled face to the audience there, saying: "Well, jestice is done sometimes, and here is a case of it. They gave that postmaster in Pennsylvania ten years in the Federal prison for robbing the mails."

Betty and her father were both so busy that none of this little sideplay was noticed, but Mrs. Henderface asked Bender with sincere interest: "Did they prove that he took the money?"

"Well, no, not exactly, but they couldn't find where it did go, and of course he couldn't pay back the government."

Meredith was not yet strong, and the exertion of waiting upon twenty persons at once was too much for him, and he staggered and leaned against the shelving, growing very pale. Betty seized the paper from Bender's hand saying, "Are you going to buy this paper or not? I can sell it to someone else, if you don't."

"No, there ain't nothing in it."

"I guess you've read it all out then," said Betty, glad to put the constable in the wrong for his picayunish meanness was too well known, "or else it is like your head—nothing in it."

The old man shrunk away as though he feared that a can of tomatoes or some other equally formidable weapon might come flying at his head, and he saw that everybody had a smile on his or her face. He got over by Charlie, who was still trying to puzzle out the sheet of music in his hand, and confided to Charlie his opinion, which was:

"Gee, ain't she mad. She looked at me as if she wished that my grandfather had died in his cradle. I'm going uptown."

"Say, Bender, are you going to the show to-night? The name of it is Vaudeville."

"No, I saw Vaudeville in Chicago two years ago," and with that he took his package of cheese which Betty handed him as though she wished it might be a bomb. Bender then left the place and one by one the customers departed, each with his mail or package of groceries. Mrs. Henderface said to herself, with an air of great distress of mind: "I am sorry that young man's record was so clean. I wanted to tell Miss Burton's father all about him tomorrow at the party. It would have been such a triumph for me, for everybody knows that she is setting her cap at him. I just hate to see such airs," and the amiable lady went her way. Luke having received a few circular letters from various mail order companies, took Sissy by the arm, saying:

"Come on, Lightning. You walk so slow we'll never reach your home—come on," and they, too, left the place, Luke helping himself liberally from a barrel of crackers, and cutting off a slice of

cheese. Betty watched the operation, and had also noticed that more than one of the loungers and customers had taken raisins and prunes from their boxes, which were displayed on the counter, so she inwardly resolved that the barrel of crackers would be empty the next day and that the prunes and raisins, as well as the cheese, should be put beyond the reach of the thoughtless depredators. Her quick mind instantly perceived how great a loss might be sustained in a year of such pickings.

Maude said, as she noticed that Logan had directed a particularly sympathetic glance at Betty, as she flew about helping her father, or rather taking the heavier portion of the load on her young shoulders:

"I must go to the drug store. I have ordered some perfume. What is your favorite?"

"Mine, oh, violet, I think," was the somewhat unsatisfactory reply. Phil's eyes still following the brave little Betty, but his eyes as well as his heart were filled with sadness and apprehension, for he knew that any woman who had had the misfortune to wed with Claude had taken a great burden of sorrow to bear through life. "Poor little thing," was his constant thought. "Poor, little Betty, poor little thing."

Maude had replied to his expressed preference for violet by saying: "How strange, just what I ordered. Our tastes agree in so many ways. Violet is such a sweet perfume, that I can scarcely get enough of it," while Betty said in an under-

tone, "And, she needs it. I used to sit next her in Sunday school, and I know."

"Did you get your regular letter from your sweetheart today?" asked Maude, with what she fondly supposed a fetching expression of archness, which could not, however, quite conceal the real feeling beneath, for Maude, who had never yet denied herself anything, but really fallen in love with this man who was a puzzle to her. There was always a depth which she could not sound in him, and she worried in secret over it. Nothing that a woman may do to win the man she has singled out for herself was left undone by Maude, but even in the most carefully laid of her plans to force an avowal from him she was obliged to admit her defeat. As to Betty, she didn't count, poor and obscure, with an old father who might any day be found out in some criminal offence, Betty did not trouble her at all. But this mysterious woman from whom he received a daily missive. It rather amused Phil that she should show her hand so plainly, and so he kept up the joke by saying:

"That is just what I did. She never misses a day, and she is, as I have often told you, the sweetest girl in the world. Let me have my mail and the package, please, Betty. I promised to show you her picture."

As he had spoken Betty dropped a weight on the empty scales, while her very lips went white. Maude gave a sigh of impatience and had a look of despair in her eyes at first. Then she rallied and smiled, but it was a queer smile that went

no farther than her lips, which were drawn back in a forced rictus. Logan pretended not to see these signs of mental disturbance, and carefully untied the package. Both the girls tried to keep their eyes turned away, and as they saw him open the package, which was a large one, and kiss the lovely face pictured there their anguished curiosity got the better of them and both looked when they thought that he was too much absorbed in the photograph to observe them, and then he suddenly turned, saying:

"Well, young ladies, what do you think of my sweetheart. I think she is the prettiest and I know she is the best girl in the world."

And he held the photograph closer and they saw the face of a lovely old lady, whose pleasant smile quite won them both even before he said with his eyes suspiciously moist:

"My own sweetheart for twenty-eight years, my mother, bless her!"

"You look like her," said Betty, lamely, seeing that he was waiting for her to express her opinion.

"Thank you, Betty, that is the greatest compliment that could be given me. And you, Miss Burton?"

"I? Oh, I think you are the best looking," said Maude, trying to speak lightly, as the relief was greater than she realized. Her shallow heart was deeply interested in this young man, and she felt that she wished she could go off alone and cry, for now, she had no mysterious rival and Betty did not count. As she looked at the

pictured face her heart sank again, for if ever a patrician was shown it was this beautiful elderly lady, Phil's mother. Her grace and breeding showed in every line of her face and in her dress, which was of an irreproachable taste and elegance. Maude thought to herself, "That gown is from Paris, and—oh—I hope—to-morrow—when he sees me in my new costume he will admire me so much that he will propose, but if he does not, I must try and arrange things so that he will be obliged to do so, and I will give father a hint that he must be the one to announce an engagement, tactfully or tacitly, so that he cannot draw back, even if he would. A man is always at a great disadvantage in such cases anyhow, as he knows he will have to fight public against opinion, and I know that often girls catch an unwilling husband by cleverness. I shall look so desirable tomorrow that any man might look a long time before he finds a wife like me, and father would be very generous for his own reasons—business reasons—and I guess he would be rather glad to get a son-in-law with so many good qualities as Phil has. And, what with Claude, I must seem like an expensive proposition to him. As to Phil being in danger of his health I don't believe it. He forgets to cough whenever he is thinking of other things, and I have listened to his breathing when we have been out in the cart, and he breathes as regularly and as deeply as anyone could. For some reason of his own he wants people to think he is ill, but I know he isn't. Well, who lives will see."

Logan had, during the time that Maude was thinking these things, been looking at the picture with a rapt expression, but finally he turned to Maude, saying:

"I am going to put this in my room at the hotel. Mother's face will give me courage to remain away from her as long as—I must."

"I am sure that she will be great company for you," said Maude.

"You are richer than I," said Phil, "for you have your dear mother with you and can see her any minute, but a man who wants to do a man's part in this world must so often be separated from her. You must be very happy with your mother," he continued half dreamily, but Maude glanced at him from under her eyelashes to make sure that he spoke seriously and was not mocking her, for she was by no means the devoted daughter that Phil believed her. So, she immediately "took a new tack," as the sailors say, and with a sad expression, said:

"Ah, my poor mother is a great sufferer, and cannot bear to have anyone remain with her very long. She had a nervous breakdown at the time of the dreadful strikes, some few years ago, and since then she wishes to have perfect quiet. We all go in to see her as often as she can bear our presence, but we feel that her wishes should be respected, especially as the physicians say absolute quiet is her only hope for complete restoration. Dear mother! She is so patient, and while she does not look in any way like your sweet mother, she looks like a saint——"



PHIL LOGAN IS MISLED.

"One of the martyrs?" asked Betty innocently, and Maude flushed angrily, and gathering her skirts about her she said to Phil:

"I am going home, and if you like we will walk along together as far as—as you like," she half whispered.

"Coming along, Claude," asked Phil to Claude, who had been standing near the mail box, smoking one cigarette after another and considerably blowing the smoke out of the open window.

Mr. Meredith was weary, and after the rush was over he went into the back room and lay down on the camp bed which stood there, while Betty found enough to busy herself with in putting things in order and trying to make a place for the boxes of things which her father paid for and which the customers were so apt to keep sampling until box after box had been emptied and not one penny paid for them. "I'll see if they impose on my daddy like this! I'll charge them for every cracker and slice of cheese they eat, and they'll never find them unless they ask," thought the poor girl. Her heart was torn to shreds, as she expressed it, seeing the way her good and generous father had been imposed upon—and it was going to be stopped, but Betty knew well what would be the outcome, these customers would go with their money to Burton's store. "Well, let them. Anyhow, I shall have stood up for poor good old Daddy against those bloodsuckers, leeches, parasites—I wonder if there is any other word to express their low down meanness? If there is I'll look it up in the dic-

tionary. Shameless dead beats, eating us out of house and home—yes, and business!”

Betty found a positive relief for her feelings in these expletives and epithets. She hated such contemptible meanness, but if the poor child had but known it, she might have found some comfort remembering that all owners of country stores and some city stores have to suffer the same conscienceless depredations.

Betty had turned her back upon Maude and Phil. The truth was she could bear no more and was afraid that she would break down and cry if they did not leave soon. When she had heard the door close she started forward to close up for the night, her heart fairly bursting with its heavy load of grief, anger and—maybe a little bit of jealousy to give added bitterness. As she turned she saw Claude standing there near the mail box still, and she said angrily, glad of some one to vent all that was seething in her heart upon. She snapped out shortly:

“I thought you had gone. I am just going to close up.”

“No, I have not gone. I want to talk with you.”

“Well, I don’t want to talk with you,” said Betty stoutly.

“But I must talk with you—just a minute—no more, if you won’t listen. Betty, I ask you for the last time. Will you marry me and beat it from this town?”

“You have insulted me enough. Now, I want

you to get out of here and never speak to me again."

"But, Betty, you are buried here in this hole, and you could be a star in the dramatic world, and we could be so happy—I could manage your business for you——"

"Get out of here—I mean it," said Betty, at her last iota of patience, "Get out."

Claude went to the door and with his hand on the knob, turned and said:

"Now, I'm going to give you fair warning. You think I am only a kid, and that I am bluffing but I'm not, and you will find it for your own interest to listen. I've got a way to get some money—big money—tonight, and if you will come we will go to Europe. You are breaking your heart over that guy Logan. He don't care a ——— for you and he don't respect you because you've been an actress. Besides, he is going to marry my sister—oh, yes, he is—but maybe he don't know it yet. He don't think you are on the level."

"You are lying, you are lying," gasped Betty, white and faint, while her tormentor continued:

"All right, think so if you like, but you will find out the truth sooner or later. He doesn't love you on the level. He is just trying to find out," and with this Parthian shot Claude, whose benumbed senses seemed to suddenly become aware of her suffering, slunk out of the place, closing the door behind him. Betty sat down on a stool and tears streamed down her pallid cheeks as the awfulness of Claude's words

seemed to burn into her very brain. That Logan should love and marry Maude she could have borne with the courage that comes to women under like circumstances, but that he should have thought her a girl to be picked up and thrown down like a worn out glove was too much for her and in that hour she suffered what had blanched young heads before. The tears flowed unheeded down her face, but no sobs broke upon the stillness. The wound was too deep, and the pain of it so great that all the relief nature could find was in the tears that fell upon her honest breast.

Her father called her from the inner room, saying:

"Come, Betty, the fire is hot now and everything is ready for supper. I fixed it so that you should get a little rest, for I could see how tired you were. Come on, dear."

"Yes, Daddy," said Betty, bravely, wiping away the tears and rising. In her distress she forgot to lock the door to the street and went into the living room where her father awaited her with a gentle and loving smile, for he was as proud as a child that he had been able to assist Betty by arranging their simple supper.

"Yes, Daddy," said the child, keeping her face in the shadow as she tripped about doing the little things which his man's lack of domestic knowledge had omitted. As soon as they sat down to their supper he urged her to eat, which at first she thought she could not do, but the healthy young body which had toiled all that long day

asserted its need and she made a very good meal and felt refreshed and strengthened.

While the father and daughter were at the table Claude came creeping back to the window and looked in. Seeing no one, he tried the door and found that it was unlocked and yielded to his touch. He opened it cautiously and crept in, closing and locking it after him. Then he crept, with all possible silence, to the mail box where his father's mail was, and he took a bunch of keys from his pocket and opened the box and drew three letters from it. Two of these he threw back after he had looked at them in the faint light of the lamp, but he took the third one, and after having breathed upon it until the gum which sealed it was loosened he slipped a pencil in under the flap and easily opened it. He then hastily took a check from the letter and closed the envelope again, and no one could have imagined that it had been tampered with. As all was quiet, he felt very courageous, and putting his hand down into the box again he found another letter, the sight of which seemed to afford him the greatest satisfaction, and he muttered:

"That was as neat a job as I ever did. They will think the old veteran is an expert, and with only one hand, too. This looks as though it might have a good, fat check in it, and so it has. I may as well make a good job of it and then for a get-away. I'll just leave this hole, and—well, she won't go and it isn't easy to kidnap a girl in these days. But there are plenty of others in

New York, and it's little old New York for mine."

But, just as Claude had finished his work with the second letter, Betty opened the door to the living room, she having remembered that she had left the door unlocked. Claude hid behind a barrel, but in his haste he left the ring of keys hanging in the lock of the open letter box.

The light was very dim in the room, but as Betty went towards the door she happened to lift her eyes to a mirror hanging on the wall in such a position that it reflected Claude and his criminal intent as he still held the open letter in his hand.

Betty's quick wits served her well, and she instantly understood the whole affair, and so did not go behind the counter but to the street door which she closed, putting the key in her pocket. Then she pulled down the window shade which left the large room in almost total darkness. She took her own lamp and was about to light it, all the while her nimble wits were working, and she was thinking what should be done to capture him redhanded, but as she lighted a match Claude who had silently crept nearer blew out the match.

Betty had but one idea and that was that she had caught the thief and she must in some way hand him over to justice, and thus save her father from undeserved ignominy. Claude, trying to hold her and take the door key from her, caught her about the throat and she fell to her knees, but at the same time crying:

"Give me that letter, you thief."

"Like ~~me~~ I will," panted Claude, for Betty was strong and active, while he was weakened by his excesses, and she fought for life, her father's honor and her own satisfaction. This last motive underlay it all as she could thus hold up her head before everybody—and Logan particularly. Claude forgot that Betty was a woman, forgot that he had professed to love her, forgot everything save that he was caught with the evidences of his crime upon him, and he held Betty by the throat with a desperate grip. She turned and writhed but could not free herself and gasped:

"Let go my throat, oh——"

"~~Let~~ you, I told you that I'd kill you and I will. You know too much, and I won't let you get out with your story." Betty struggled as only those who know their lives are in imminent danger can struggle. She caught his collar and tore it off, scratched his face till the blood ran down. She felt her strength going with that desperate grip on her throat, but as they fought about they hit against a pile of boxes which all crashed to the floor with such a noise that the old man in the next room heard it and opened the door, holding a lamp in his hand. The sight that met his eyes was a terrible one to a father, for Betty stood there, like a white fury, panting for breath, while Claude lay prone upon the floor a pitiable creature. Betty's dress was torn and her hair dishevelled, while Claude looked like a dead man, but Betty held the letter in her hand which he had stolen and had not yet opened.

Before she spoke, Betty put the letter in the Burton box and locked it and put the ring of keys in her pocket, and then she opened the door for Claude, saying meaningly:

"Good night, Mr. Burton," and bleeding, his clothes torn and he too cowed and frightened to say one word passed out into the night, not seeing that Logan was standing there, in the shadow.

"What is the matter, Betty?" the father had asked as he saw the strange group.

"Nothing, Daddy, only Mr. Burton has had an accident. His motor car skidded."

And then they went into the other room where Betty told her father all that she deemed necessary regarding the matter. They then retired. Betty lay awake hours after they had retired trying to decide upon a line of action regarding the exposure of Claude. He had the stolen check in his possession and she had his private bunch of keys in hers.

Then there was the question of the party next day to consider. She had the cards of invitation and did not know that Maude had not sent them, yet she felt the scent of battle in the air and finally she determined to go. It would be the first time that she had ever been able to show herself to her fellow townsmen in a dress and manner befitting the daughter of a noble old soldier, and to her great satisfaction she remembered that she had an exquisite gown that she had had made, expecting to wear it in a new play where she was to be able to show her ability. This dress she had never worn, and she had a

hat as handsome after the manner of hats as her dress was stylish. Stylish and elegant it was, without being showy, and it was of a delicate, creamy white. This was decidedly her most becoming color.

But what should she do for suitable shoes and stockings. At last she went to sleep with that weighty question undecided.

She had utterly forgotten those "gold shoes," and they were really so small that she should not be blamed for having forgotten. And there were those delicate pink silk stockings. After all, she need not despair.

So, in spite of all that had happened, with the elasticity of youth, Betty slept, and awakened the next morning bright and ready for the day's duties, tasks and pleasures.

"Blessings on the man who invented sleep," said the honorable Sancho Panza.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAWN PARTY AT BURTONS

The next day was an eventful one for the inhabitants of Logan's Corners. It was the Fourth of July, and every one was dressed in gala attire. The air was filled with patriotic music, and flags were seen flying everywhere. But all day long the one subject of conversation was the grand lawn party to be given at the Burton's in the evening.

The few members of the Grand Army of the Republic were sitting in their lodge room holding an impromptu Camp Fire, at which Old Captain Selby was the honored guest, in memory of the old days. Old war memories were revived, old battles fought over again, everywhere good-fellowship prevailed. Smoke rolled out in one steady volume from the windows of their lodge room; a sure token of the united comradeship of those within.

Mr. Burton's house and grounds were decorated with flags and Chinese lanterns, while over the front door hung an immense flag draped in a graceful festoon. Tables and chairs were placed around the porch and on the lawn for the guests. The moon would be full and the day

was all that could be desired for an outdoor affair.

The house was built in the old Colonial style, set back from the gate, giving a view of a large conservatory on one side and the newly constructed garage on the other. The stable had been overshadowed by the pretentious garage for the housing of Claude's successive machines. Beyond the conservatory a dancing pavilion had been erected with a fine band stand, and besides this there were swings and other means for the amusement of the children.

"Well, daughter," said Mr. Meredith, as evening drew on, "I am not sure that it is a good idea for us to go to their party. I feel that there is something wrong somewhere and perhaps we'd better stay at home. Besides—to tell you the truth, Betty, my dear, I don't feel that I want you to be second to none in any way, and—while the old army suit is all right for me, why girls need other things and I have not thought about seeing that you had them. Yes—I know that you are better than any of them, and a sight prettier, but in this world fine feathers make fine birds——"

"Never mind me, Daddy, I have a white frock that'll be good enough. The only thing is that I shall have to wear my pink silk stockings and gold shoes. But I guess they will pass as my dress is long."

"Now, I never thought of you in a long frock Betty, and it will make you seem like a woman, while you are and always will be my little girl.

Well, you could outshine them all in a gingham frock."

Betty had smiled a little sadly as she thought of her simple little frock upstairs. She wondered what Logan would say, then decided that she did not care what he thought, but it would give her some satisfaction to know just what Maude would think. Truly there is a lot of moral courage in being well dressed.

At last the hour arrived and, as the people in the country usually start early to any party, groups could be seen going there soon after the sun had set. Mothers and children, all spick and span and well behaved, with the fathers beside them beaming with pride in their offspring. They were all wending their way along the dusty street to the Burton's. The grounds seemed almost like fairyland to them. Flowers were set in vases on every table, and the whole scheme of decoration was so well carried out that it left nothing to be desired.

Maude and Logan stood at the foot of the steps leading to the front door. Burton made himself into a committee of one to meet the arrivals and welcome them, leaving Logan as the ostensible host. He did not like this at all, for he knew well that it was done to make the reported engagement a certainty, and he had his own and very good reasons for wishing to postpone such an announcement forever. But sometimes one is forced into a position so false and so undesired that one has no power to avoid it. Such was the position Logan was forced into—a posi-

tion as the intended husband of Maude—that he felt his heart sink as he thought of the difficulty he would have in extricating himself from the trap of his own springing.

Mrs. Burton had been fairly dragged out of her seclusion by Maude and her father, and she sat in an easy chair on the porch. Claude was missing, and no one but Logan had seen him that day.

Maude wore a delicate and beautiful gown of soft and almost transparent lilac silk, with yards and yards of beautiful lace upon it, while the large picture hat which she wore set her off to the best advantage. The sleeves were so arranged as to give it a semi-classical effect, and Maude looked better this evening than she ever did. The soft tissue of her robe with its lovely color was set off by the green of the grass and plants about her, and she knew when to gain the best effect from the background of trees and foliage. She carried a large bouquet of bride roses in one hand and a fan in the other, so that she could make each new arrival welcome by a sweeping bow without being expected to offer her hand.

Burton's expressed desire was that this day he should not be viewed in the light of an employer to anyone—a great many of the guests worked for him—and they should not be considered his employees. They were to meet on an equal footing and all be like one family. This pleasing fiction was well understood by all, and was taken at its just value. But, all intended

to have as good a time as possible and to eat all they could get.

As soon as all the guests had arrived, except a few veterans, Betty and her father, the band began to play and the dancing was begun. Maude started the dance with the Burgess of the town as her partner, and after with one of the operatives at the mill, showing the democratic spirit of the gathering. Logan was uneasy for a variety of reasons, which we know already, and he kept a strict watch for Claude, but that young man did not appear.

Several of the women went to Mrs. Burton and showed their pleasure at seeing her again. She was genuinely pleased to see them and a special tea was served for her and these ladies. Old times were discussed, and many pleasant topics came up for conversation. She felt brighter and better than she had in a long time. She wondered why Maude thought they did not care to meet her, and she decided that in the future she was going to see her old friends if she wished. The question of the reported engagement of her daughter was discussed, but she told them that Maude would herself announce that when she got ready.

As Maude and Phil stood by the doorsteps and he was fanning her, the band began to play the wedding march. All that knew anything about music smiled while Phil colored with deep anger, saying to himself:

"Well, this is about the rawest thing I ever heard of. They don't catch me in that net—

not if I can help it, and I think I shall know how to escape it. I wonder where little Betty is. That girl is the greatest puzzle that I ever came across. Sometimes I think she is deep—next time I find her frank and honest, and I don't know who could look into her limpid eyes and dream of guile. I wonder what the poor little thing will wear. I feel sorry for her."

Again the unmistakable strains of the wedding march floated to them and Phil angrily asked Maude what that meant, especially as he noticed that many of the guests looked at them and smiled meaningly.

"Oh," said Maude, drooping her eyes, a trick she had, as she imagined that she looked very maidenly and modest. "I suppose it is just a joke of the girls. You know that they have been gossiping that you and I are engaged, and that this party is in honor of the announcement."

"Is that so——" said Phil, so enraged that he literally could find no words. "Well, I——" and he turned and sat down heavily on one of the chairs, leaving Maude to stand there alone. But this was not noticed as the footman in resplendent livery came along wheeling a tea chair with coffee for the guests. Charlie and Mrs. Henderface were sitting near them. The melancholy Charlie asked several questions of the lady who was rather proud to inform him upon the subject as it proved her better breeding. This lady was dressed in a remarkable blue dress which was not only baby blue but made in baby style as well.

Charlie had one passion and that was for good coffee, hot, strong, sweet and plenty of it, and he felt particularly ill used as the tiny cup of after dinner coffee was offered him, even without the dinner. "Refreshments" it was said would be served to the guests, and he fairly growled as he thought this was the "refreshment"—a thimble full of black coffee.

"I'd better have stayed at home," he said gloomily.

"Don't show your ignorance of things done in good society," said Mrs. Henderface. "Miss Burton is showing Mr. Logan that we have real society at the Corners."

"Society is all right, but when I'm hungry I want to eat. I saved my appetite all day thinking we were to have a fine feed up here."

"Well, there'll probably be sandwiches and soft drinks," whereat Charlie grunted that if that was all he would go home. But Mrs. Henderface persuaded him to remain, and he sat still while the butler with remarkably fat legs in silk stockings wheeled the coffee about on the machine. Charlie took a pin from his coat and stuck it into the man's leg but the butler never moved or showed by a wink of his eye that he was aware of it. It was an indignity but he had not known it, and Charlie almost smiled as he told the secret to Mrs. Henderface that the man had stuffed calves.

As the man approached, Mrs. Henderface took out her note book and pencil and asked him his name.



BETTY AND HER DADDY.

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"Hubbard, madam," and this was said more by movement of his lips than by any sound that issued from them.

"This is for the society column of the Beacon. Your name then is Hubbard?"

"Yes madam."

"Where are you from, Hubbard?"

"New York, madam, Hotel Astor, engaged here special. London, England, before, madam."

"Have you ever waited on the nobility?"

"Yes, mum, waited on the Prince of Wales, silver wedding," and this the lady wrote down painstakingly, while Charlie looked on admiringly. She said to Charlie:

"There, you see! Do you know what a silver wedding is?"

"Yes, I read once. A silver wedding is proof of a man's endurance."

"That will do Hubbard," said Mrs. Henderface with a very superior air, as she took the little cup of black coffee and if truth must be told having her mind and thoughts set upon the "flesh pots of Egypt" as well as Charlie. Charlie thought he would forage a little on his own account. Luke and Sissy were standing near and Charlie went to them while Luke, as soon as he had caught sight of Hubbard's legs, sang softly: "I knew a man," and Charlie took out his mouth organ and began to play the same song. Sissy began to laugh, but at that moment she caught sight of a dozen servants all coming along bringing trays piled with sandwiches, and cakes, and lemonade. Maude was very much bored by the

whole affair, and she tried by every artifice in a woman's repertoire to keep Phil by her. The other guests wandered like fishes out of water, and the only ones who were having a good time at all were the children. They were playing on the long "teeter boards", swinging and climbing trees and doing many other things. There were some who danced and liked it, but there was no life or spirit in the whole gathering.

Logan had difficulty in keeping his temper and finally said:

"The natives, as you call them, are very amusing. I am sorry Miss Meredith and her father are late."

"Oh, they are not coming."

"Oh yes they are," replied Phil with aggravating certainty.

"I did not invite them," said Maude with a toss of her head which she fondly believed to be queenly.

"I took that liberty," said Phil quietly. "You gave me two tickets to dispose of as I would and I mailed them to Miss Meredith and her father," replied Logan, with his mind made up firmly that Betty should be received as one of the welcome guests if he could accomplish it.

"Perhaps it is just as well," said Maude after a moment's reflection. "She can then see and hear things just as they are and not go on living in a fool's Paradise. You can't stop people talking, you know."

"Talking about what," queried Phil, while a red line formed down his forehead between the

brows, a sure sign of an inward tempest with him. Maude did not understand this danger signal or she would have been more chary of her words. She said with downcast eyes and a simper:

"Why, about us. Do you know that at one time I was just a little wee bit jealous of her."

"Of whom?" asked Phil icily.

"Why that Meredith girl."

He brought himself up to his intended plan and said laughingly, for it would not answer to break off entirely with Maude as he had so much at stake which she did not know and could not know.

"Oh, how could you?"

"Wasn't I foolish?" she replied laying her hand upon his arm and cuddling up to him as far as she dared in view of all the people.

"I should say you are—I mean were," replied Phil dryly.

And then he muttered to himself: "I must control my anger for the sake of the furtherance of my plans," while Maude was trying to get it through her mind whether he had meant the first or last part of his sentence. She asked him quite sharply what he meant and he replied in a pacifying tone:

"I beg your pardon, but I meant that of course. I must say Miss Burton that you look stunning to-night. The color of gown is so becoming to your style of beauty, and the classic manner in which those folds fall—and ah—you have very beautiful diamonds. I am not very good at un-

derstanding women's fixings, but it seems to me that your whole get-up is really artistic."

Maude was pleased, nay more, delighted, for she had felt so disappointed that he should, up to now, have appeared to take her costume for granted as one of the set pieces of the display. She smiled happily and kept her thin arms hidden so far as possible within the classical folds of which he had spoken. She and her dress-maker knew that her arms were thin and not pretty by any means, and so the long sleeves which fell apart at the shoulder were made so that they could be brought together with apparent carelessness over the elbows, which were undeniably ugly. About her neck where the half low bodice left the bony neck exposed she had such a profusion of pearls with diamond pendants that few would notice the neck itself, admiring the jewels. So Maude turned her eyes at Phil saying:

"Oh yes; I suppose they are but I am so tired of them. I am tired of everything, I guess. I am getting old and want to settle down," and here Maude stopped for the space of a breath to give him time to disclaim any idea that she could ever grow old, but he either did not or would not see it, so she bit her lips and continued: "Papa says he is going to settle *so much* money on me soon, as nothing in this world is sure but death and taxes, and he wants to feel that my future is secure. You see he has little comfort in Claude, and poor mother is so ill that she may go off

any minute. And he is going to make my fortune entirely my own to do with as I like."

Even this glittering bait failed to make the fish rise, and Maude listened with ill concealed impatience as he replied half absently: "That's fine! I know you won't object if I ask you——"

"What, Phil?" half whispered Maude, leaning still nearer him.

"Will you arrange that when Mr. Meredith comes the band play the Star Spangled Banner? The old soldier will be so pleased, and I suppose the other veterans will be along too."

"I thought you were going to say something else," said Maude, whose disappointment was bitter. Logan saw her distress and whispered:

"I shall have lots to say later—will you do this for me? I have a reason for asking this, and will explain later. Will you?"

"Will I what?" said she, wishing to draw him out further, but he appeared not to understand her deeper meaning and again repeated his request that the band should play the National Anthem when the old man came. Maude bent towards him and said sweetly, while her heart was filled with almost murderous jealousy:

"Yes, for your sake, I would do more than that," and she swept away to give the necessary order while Burton hastened to Philip's side mopping his brow for it was very warm as he had been busy trying to see that everything was done right. Mrs. Burton being an invalid, and Maude being so wrapped up in her first real love affair, and Claude nowhere to be found, it devolved

upon him to "keep the ball a rolling" as he termed it. So he approached Logan saying heartily:

"Have a cigar Philip, you don't object, do you?"

"Not at all if it isn't too strong. You know I am rather delicate."

"Tut—tut—— I wish I were just as delicate as you are and no more so. Ah, you are a clever young man, but I know you. This is between us. I have a letter from your chief in Washington, to whom I had written to complain of this post office business. I am glad they put you on the job. How are you and Maude getting on?"

"Oh very well, very well indeed," replied Phil, the cold chills running up and down his back while his hair stood on end.

"She will be a rich girl, Philip."

"Yes sir," said Phil, fearing what was coming.

"And I also know that you are not a poor man," said the elder man poking Phil in his ribs, which made Phil say under his breath:

"I am that Washington office. They had no right to talk of my private affairs."

"You needn't be bashful, for you have my full consent," said Burton kindly, for he really liked Phil and hoped he and Maude would marry. He felt the masterful nature of the young man and thought it could but have a good influence upon Claude and Maude as well, for her fits of temper at home were rather trying.

Logan's face took on a forbidding look as he replied, not coldly but with meaning: "You will pardon me for not expressing myself in this mat-

ter at the present time. I am here on official duty and business as you are aware, and duty——”

“Supercedes matrimony, eh? Well, my boy, do your duty, and do as you like and don’t forget it. I think all the more of you. We must not spare man or woman when they break the laws of our Government. They must be dealt with severely. No woman stars nor old soldier records must stand in the way.”

“I’ll remember,” replied Phil, while the veins on his forehead swelled perceptibly, as in the distance he saw Betty and her father entering. As they approached the music struck up the Star Spangled Banner and they entered through a lane formed of the other guests, who somehow sensed that something out of the ordinary was meant that this music should be played for the entrance of the old soldier.

Burton had started and turning to Logan said hurriedly:

“What does this mean? Why has this been done?”

“Don’t say a word sir, I have had it done—it is a part of a plan.”

“Oh, all right then, my son, I leave it all to you,” and saying this Burton withdrew, leaving Logan to receive the couple as they came to the door steps where all had been received.

The old soldier looked beautiful if such a word can be applied to a man. His soft white hair took a silvery gleam in the lights, while his gentle face beamed with a smile so ineffably sweet

and calm that all who saw him march along with lifted face and military bearing half wanted to cry. He wore the medal pinned to his breast, but in the lapel of his coat, just above the button of the Grand Army of the Republic he had a tiny bow of tri-colored ribbon, small and insignificant to those who did not know, but to those who did know the meaning of it it bore a great message, and told that the wearer had been all that a soldier could be, and this had been given For conspicuous bravery on the battle field.

Logan hurried to meet them and led them along to a seat where the old man sank as he was tired with the walk and so much excitement.

Betty had kept her own counsel regarding the affairs of the previous night, and was prepared for anything that might happen this night, but the reception that had been given her father had thrown her off her guard and she was at a loss to understand it. She said:

"Sit down, father, I wish to speak to Mr. Logan."

The old man smiled at Logan and at all within the reach of his vision, and obeyed his daughter. She turned her bright face, which was now shadowed, and asked him point blank:

"Did you arrange this, Mr. Logan?"

Logan, as he looked into the pure eyes lifted to his could not have lied to her so he said, quite as a matter of course:

"Why, yes. I thought your father would like it." At the same time looking at Betty in amazement. He had up to now beheld her, so

to speak, under a cloud. She had not dressed as she was dressed now and he fairly caught his breath as he looked at her. She appeared to be utterly unconscious of his look of admiration, and listened for him to speak. But the old man with a beatific smile on his face said: "I did like it, Mr. Logan, and when I heard that I feel just as young as when I was at old Chickamauga. That blessed old flag up there, and all around here, I tell you they bring the old days back and make my heart bound like a hammer. Somebody called it Old Glory, and that is just what it is, and God grant that it always remain so," said the old soldier with lifted face and reverent eyes. Logan was strangely stirred and coughed two or three times before he could speak, but finally he said:

"Lots of your old friends are here to-night, and your old comrades in the war. They will be around here in a minute."

"Yes," said Betty, and every word stung like a wasp, "Mr. Burton wants to rent them the second floor of his new building. He loves old soldiers."

Mr. Meredith spoke before Logan could reply to this and said ecstatically: "I suppose if the boys are here they will want me to make a speech, they always do. Well, I am quite prepared. I have been making a speech on Fourth of July and Memorial day for over thirty years now."

"Don't get excited Daddy. They may not ask you, knowing that you are not so strong," and then turning to Logan, Betty gave him a look

which seemed to show him that she did not consider her father altogether responsible. But he continued:

"Well if they do Betty, you won't have to be ashamed of your old Daddy. I can't refuse them. I'll run along and see the boys. I'll run along."

Betty arranged her father's tie, and looked him all over as a mother would a child, and then kissed him tenderly, while Logan felt his heart ache with pity and sympathy for this unfortunate couple.

Meredith, learning where the old comrades were to be found, started off, his "running" being a tottering walk. Logan turned as Betty said with a sob in her voice:

"That is the way Daddy runs now, poor old Daddy! I think he will never quite recover from that injury."

Again Logan thought things which being interpreted would mean that he was a brute and this the most unfortunate piece of business that he had ever been mixed in.

CHAPTER X

BETTY LEARNS MANY THINGS

Logan looked at the little woman-girl beside him and in his dumb man's way decided that she certainly knew how to dress. Her gown was made with what is known as a Dutch neck, which is a modest and yet dressy way of having the material cut away enough to show the round white throat, with its dimples and curves, while the sleeves ended above the elbows and showed two bewitching dimples there. The turn of her wrist was such as an artist might seek far and not find, while her little feet in their gilded shoes "like mice peeped in and out." The whole effect of her costume was one of studied simplicity, yet a rival woman would instantly have seen its studied elegance and fineness of ornamentation, and all that exquisite work done by hand. And hand work on women's wear makes it costly. Betty looked the princess in disguise. Her graceful figure was but faintly suggested in the many folds of her dress, but nevertheless the eye followed every faintly suggested curve and line, satisfied and pleased. Betty remained silent a few moments as though gathering her thoughts, and finally she said:

"Mr. Logan, I did not want to come here to-night for I felt that it was some trap to make me unhappy, but Father wanted to come so much that at the last moment I decided to do so. He is like a child now and I could not bear to have him disappointed."

"Well, it would not have been just right when you were invited."

"Yes, and I can't understand that invitation. The Burtons love me so much they would bankrupt their conservatory planting flowers on my grave."

"You are a very vindictive little lady," Phil said, but what he thought was: "There is something that is 'cross-eyed' here, as the French have it. I never saw such perfectly frank and honest eyes in my life, and I can't help believing that this girl is terribly wronged in some way. I can't even believe the proofs seen by my own eyes. She stood there that day with a letter in her hand and Claude, that hound, was looking it over with her. She spoke of a little baby in an asylum. Now why did I jump at a conclusion so quickly. Nothing could make me believe one word against this girl's purity, and yet—I saw him sneaking from their door in the dark last night. She was there for I saw her and her father, but—I know as well as I know I am alive that this child is innocent of wrong."

Betty replied to his last remark by saying with a sharp little look in her mobile face: "I'll bet they don't miss any meals being glad to see

me. But all I care is that I hope they will treat my Daddy right."

"They shall!" said Logan, with sharp decision, "but I am glad to see you, Betty. I am glad."

"Are you?" murmured Betty.

"I most pointedly am." He replied, looking at her with undisguised admiration in spite of all his miserable doubts.

"It was nice of you to have that entrance music for Daddy," she conceded.

"I knew it would please you."

"Did you, honest now?"

"I am perfectly *honest* with you," said he meaningly.

"Sometimes I don't know how to take you," said Betty reflectively while she looked at him with perfect frankness.

"Do you want to take me?" he said in a low voice and with meaning in his eyes. Betty replied:

"Yes; I want to take you for a good friend, and I want to believe you."

"Do you want to be honest with me, Betty?"

"Yes, if you will reply to this. Do you—dislike—a girl that has been on the stage?"

"No, not if they were all like you."

"Then you think it possible for a girl to be good that has been on the stage?" said she, returning to her question, for the reply meant much to her.

"If the girl were like you, yes."

"I knew Claude was telling a story."

"What did you say?"

"Oh, just talking to myself," said Betty, with a new light in her eyes but with a stern expression on her lips.

"Now, that's not polite," said Logan, hesitating as to whether he should or should not insist on knowing what she had said, and which he had but imperfectly heard, but while he hesitated Betty said blithely, for a great load had been lifted from her heart:

"Well, I accept your apology. Say, let's do something. I want to act like I am having a good time."

"Why should you act so. Why not have it? And what would suit you best, and best fill your idea of a good time?"

"Oh well, I am having a good time just now, seeing all these people mooning around and trying to feel at home in their oppressor's home, and in their store clothes on this hot night. But this good time will not last. It will melt away like ice cream and there'll be nothing left but sweetened skim milk with a little vanilla taste to it."

Logan looked about him and smiled at Betty's apt description of the "good time" the guests were supposed to be having.

Some of them had captured trays filled with sandwiches and cakes and some others had found lemonade, and they were doing their best to believe themselves having a fine time. Some of the children already had the colic, as there was an apple tree in the enclosure on which were hundreds of velvety little green apples, and they with

ice cream and lemonade made an unfortunate combination. Some of the guests had not been able to get enough to appease their hunger, and all was confusion and in general great dissatisfaction, such as exists at all picnics, where the providing is like that of everyday life. Some get all and the rest none or next to none.

But those who loved to dance were happy, for the platform for dancing was well made and the music good. Logan noted all this in one swift glance and smiled at Betty's worldly wisdom and said as if in answer to her assertion:

"Betty, I hoped last night that it would last forever, and then—last night—I understood, and I said nothing although I——"

Here the explanation which would have cleared away many shadows was cut short as Maude came hastening back, as she had learned that Betty and Logan were sitting under a tree together. This was by no means in her program and she hurried to them saying familiarly:

"Were you looking for me Phil?"

"Ah, no, that is, Miss Meredith and I were——"

Betty broke in, saying, "talking about the weather a few moments ago. It was all sunshine then, but now it looks like a storm coming."

Maude was not noted for penetration nor for quick wit, and so she could not understand the allusion and looked up saying nothing but sweeping the horizon for the threatened storm. Betty whispered: "She didn't get that down."

"Oh, how could it be sunshine when the moon

is out, and there is no sign of a storm," said Maude in all innocence of Betty's real meaning. Logan stood back smiling inwardly, thinking that this meeting of the two girls promised some interesting events.

"Certainly not——" Then in a low voice Betty added "Take her away. I told you the ice cream would soon all melt away."

Maude felt that she must somehow get rid of this dangerous girl who had seen so much of the world and who was here and so very fascinating, partly from the fact that she had been on the stage. So, to show Betty her ownership of Logan, she said, while she pretended to shudder:

"Phil, will you kindly get me my shoulder wrap, the lace one. I feel a little chilly."

"Hum," mused Betty, "I'll need a fur coat if she stays here." Logan heard this and chuckled to himself as he prepared to seek the lace wrap. He wouldn't have known whether a wrap was a blanket or a fur neckpiece if she had not said lace. So, as a dutiful cavalier, he went into the house, but just as he was about to enter the door Betty called out in her clear bell like voice, saying with the same indolent drawl that Maude had used: "And, Phil, will you please bring me a dish of ice cream? I'm getting very warm."

"Certainly, certainly, ladies; anything to oblige."

Betty felt that she had fired the master gun and rose to leave the spot when Maude with her most haughty and insolent air said:

"Just a minute, Miss—Miss——"



BETTY CIRCUMVENTS MR. BURTON AT THE LAWN FETE.

"Meredith, Betty Meredith. I left my card case at home on the pianola."

"Well Miss Meredith, I think in justice to you, we should have a clear understanding."

"Ya'as, and I was thinking that it would be just as well."

Betty suddenly thought of all her good resolves about "forgiveness of them that despitefully use you" and tried with all her might to bring her mind into the state of calm and measureless love to all, but somehow she could not do it, and after the way of many another she put off the practice until a more favorable moment and sincerely promised to forgive anything that Maude might do or say—tomorrow.

Betty had risen to her feet and Maude, with her grandest air, said to Betty: "Won't you be seated?"

"Yes, thank you," said Betty feeling as she thought to herself like a sort of porcupine. When seated she said in a very business and entirely unabashed way: "Commence."

"You may not know it, but Mr. Logan and I are in a way—I might say, engaged."

"In what way?"

"Why, the announcement may be made tonight, if I so decide."

"Um-m, but how does this interest me?" said Betty stoutly, though her little hands were clenched tightly, so that her rings cut her fingers, but Maude could not see or know this.

"Oh, perhaps not at all, but in justice to you I think I should tell you so that you may not

make a fool of yourself in the presence of my guests."

"I don't quite get your meaning," said Betty, each word being like a knife thrust.

"Well, since you will have it, I must tell you that Mr. Logan has shown you some little attentions—but for business reasons only, and I don't want you to misconstrue his motives."

"For business reasons? What is he selling, groceries or tobacco, or what? Maybe, hardware," returned Betty and in such a tone that Maude felt she was getting the worst of the matter entirely.

"I am sorry you take this friendly advice as a joke, for I assure you that it is very serious, and were you not such a silly thing I would not waste my time telling you. Mr. Logan has been using your friendship for a purpose. He is a Government Secret Service man and was sent here to watch your father, and the easiest way to catch the post office thief was to be friendly with the daughter. He has been fooling you, that is all."

"It isn't true," said the poor girl, clinging to that possibility as to a life line. Maude kept her superior air and manner and laughed bitterly, saying:

"You poor silly little thing, you could not have dared to think that he would want to marry you. He is a gentleman, and will look in his own class for a wife—you see I treat you as simply a foolish child, and not as an adventuress as some might think after you have been so long on the stage."

For once in her life Betty was too crushed to reply with her customary spirit and she sat trembling while tears stood in her eyes. Maude continued:

"Ask him if all I say is not true. He can't deny it."

"Why," said Betty with tears in her voice, "why did you invite me to come here only to insult me?"

"I did not send you those invitations. Mr. Logan did—it was for a purpose. He wanted to watch you, and he didn't want to be away from me."

At this moment Logan came back bringing the shawl and giving it to Maude who turned her shoulders for him to put it on, and then she said:

"You will have to excuse me, Miss Meredith. Will you come, Phil, I am going to organize a good old fashioned country dance for the natives."

"If you will permit I will remain here for a short time. I have been overdoing a trifle I fear."

Maude was thus obliged to leave Phil in the hands of Betty, so she went on, calling to him not to forget that the next dance after the country dance would be their waltz.

Logan heard a pitiful little sob, half stifled in Betty's handkerchief, and he said: "Betty, I ordered your ice cream. Why, what's the matter? You are crying, little girl. I——Betty."

"I—I wish you would call me Miss Meredith," said she.

"Why, I don't understand you!"

"I will tell you. I know now who you are. You helped me the first day you met me. I know why you did. You are a Secret Service man, and came here to spy on my father. I didn't know, I thought you were a real man, but you are a spy. But I am not going to be laughed at. I came here by your invitation and brought my father with me. I'll stay to show them all that I am not afraid of you. You thought you had your case won. Well you haven't. You have let everybody think that my father was a thief. You were working for Burton and are going to marry his daughter. Well, go on and marry her, and I'm not going to let my old Daddy know that you have used my friendship to spy on him."

These words were said so rapidly and with such swift determination that Logan was fairly taken off his feet, but he tried to stem the current of her reproach and said:

"Let me explain. You are mistaken Betty, you——"

At this instant Maude, fearing that she had done wrong to leave these two together, returned, saying:

"This is our dance, Phil, and I am waiting."

Logan allowed Maude to drag him away from Betty all the more readily as he felt sure that she was in too angry and wounded a frame of mind to allow him to explain, and so with an

appealing look and a deep sympathy for the forlorn girl Phil went with Maude, while Betty caught her breath angrily and said to herself:

"I am going to stay here. I am not going to cry. I know I've got the proof of my father's innocence. I am going to hold up my head and fight this night through. He shan't see that I am hurt. I am going to sing—and dance—— It is I who will have the last word."

Just then she started up in surprise and joy as Sammy her former fellow actor came into view looking for her. He was dressed in a new suit of remarkable pattern and his necktie was even redder than before.

"Betty!" he said gladly, holding out both his hands, "I have been chasing all over town to find you."

"Why Sammy, when did you get here? Where did you come from?"

"I wrote you yesterday, all about it."

"I didn't get the letter."

"Well, it's good news. Cohen sent this three hundred and fifty dollars. I remembered the date of the Constable's sale on your father's place, kept the bill, and showed it to Cohen. He ain't very flush yet, but he hustled and dug it up, and now, as they say in the dear old melodrama, 'You can save the farm.'"

"That's great of you Sammy, but that's the least of my troubles. My father is accused of robbing the mail. Oh, he is innocent all right but I don't want to give up the guilty party."

"You would let your old father go up for some

guy you are sweet on? Is that it?" asked Sammy gravely.

"Oh no, it isn't that. They can't send him up. I mean the real thief unless I give the proofs, but Sammy, it will kill a little girl that this man should marry. It would make an orphan of a little baby boy only three months old, and it would make a hero of a man who tried to make a fool of me. That's the story Sammy, and this is the third act. I don't know how it is going to end. I've got to think it out, and I'm afraid I'm not clever enough."

Jade Bender came strutting along just then and his steely eyes were fixed upon the newcomer who whispered to Betty:

"Hully Gee! Here is the twin star that attached us."

"Don't worry, don't run. That has been settled and I have paid it back."

Bender saw Betty and approached her saying, so that no one but Sammy heard:

"You will excuse me for talking business on this glorious occasion, but tomorrow at nine I am to sell out your father's store and I thought maybe you had something to say about it."

"You will not sell out my father's store," said Betty angrily.

"Well, I must at nine sharp. Here is the authority, and here is the judgment and this is the order of the court."

"And here is your three hundred and fifty dollars Mr. Bender, to pay the judgment," said

Betty handing the roll of bills which Sammy had just handed her.

"What!" said the Constable, who looked at the roll, but who did not offer to take the money. "Well, I'm glad that you can pay it, but this here is a legal holiday and it can't be paid till tomorrow morning and there's thirty-five dollars cost, my fee."

"Well, I make you the offer now. Take the money now, and hand in the receipt in the morning," said Sammy, "and now, leave us, your carriage waits."

Bender left them feeling defrauded somehow in spite of the fact that he would get his own money as well as the payment which was due, and saying to himself that there was something shady about the way Betty got so much money. Betty, now that the strain was lifted regarding the store, began to cry softly which caused Sammy to ask what was wrong. Betty with the frankness of the "profession" told him between her sobs that she had made a fool of herself and fallen in love. "And you know I always said I never would, but I did and he was only fooling me, Sammy, fooling me," and she wept disconsolately.

"Was it another girl, Betty, I'll bet she can't dance like you, and I know she ain't as pretty."

"No, it isn't that. Men like him don't want girls that dance. They want a rich girl, one with a father who has lots of money. My old Daddy is not rich, but he is better than hers any day, and I—oh, I made an awful mistake. I

thought he loved me. I am so ashamed, and she said they were all laughing at me—they all knew he was fooling me, pretending to be my friend. She laughed and sneered at me. I see it all now, I see it all now. He was only pretending he liked me to spy upon my Daddy. He loves her—she is a girl in his own class. He was only fooling me Sammy and oh, it hurts me so—it hurts me so!”

Sammy took the bright little head over on his shoulder and patted her hands, saying:

“Don’t cry so, kid, don’t. They are not worth it. Why I wouldn’t give a girl like you for a packed house of those skirts. Brace up, be your own self, the brave little Betty of the old days. Don’t let them see you cry.”

Just then the voice of the melancholy Charlie invited everybody to choose partners for the Virginia reel. Betty roused and wiped her eyes saying:

“You are right, Sammy, and I’ll be gay. I’ll be happy and I’ll dance. You’ll be my partner, I’ll show him I don’t care, and show her I don’t care.”

Together they went to the platform and Betty danced the reel with a grace rarely seen, and then Sammy whispered to the musicians who immediately began a melody to which Betty danced as she had never danced before. It seemed as though the very spirit of the dainty Lola Montez was before them and all watched her in amazement. The little figure flew, floated, whirled and bounded as never before.

The dance grew wilder, more poetic and more active until with a final whirl Betty became a girl again instead of the spirit of grace.

All the guests had gathered about to see this dance and all applauded save Maude whose heart was filled with bitter hatred. Phil was worried by something he seemed to feel in this sudden outbreak, but he could not understand.

Betty's father, having come to see what all the excitement was about, applauded with the rest. To his simple and pure mind whatever Betty did was right, and he thought it but only one more of her natural gifts and therefore something to be proud of. She sprang down from the platform to her father's waiting arm, and as he held her tightly he said:

"My little girl is having a fine time tonight. I'm glad to see her so happy."

"Happy," said Betty, with her cheeks of fire, and her curls tousled, "Why Daddy I am the happiest girl in the world tonight. I never was happier in all my life——"; but at this instant she caught the look in Phil's eyes and nearly fainted, and he sprang to seize her but with a mighty effort she rallied. Phil had said "Betty you are ill."

"Ill, no I'm well and happy, oh so happy! Come Daddy, come Sammy let us walk. Isn't it a beautiful night. Let's go. I want to hear all the music. I want to sing and dance, and to be happy, happy."

There was a general movement among the guests who now seemed to have been awakened

by Betty's marvellous dance, and they wandered about in groups looking for refreshments, awaiting till the next dance should be announced. The Burgess captured Maude who was obliged to go with him much against her will, and she gave Phil a longing look as she was led away, but his whole attention was given to Betty and he did not even know Maude had gone.

CHAPTER XI

BETTY MAKES THE HIT OF HER CAREER

Logan drew away into shadows of the trees. He could not bear to speak to any one or to be spoken to. What did this wild dance mean? He must know, and he must know what had been said to Betty to prod her into such a thing. As he wandered along in the shadow he ran against Claude whose presence was made known by the cigarette in his lips. He looked worn out and shaky, and showed nothing of his old assurance. Logan said sternly:

"Why didn't you show up before?"

"Well I'm here now, and that's all you need to know. I can't face them all, and every time I see you, you put me through the third degree. I'm not going to confess anything. I—I have nothing to confess?"

"You tried to get away last night."

"Yes I did, but you've got your blood hounds at every corner, even on the freights. I'm not going to run away."

"I happen to know that you got one check for three hundred and fifty dollars that night."

"I didn't get it. Why don't you arrest me if you want to? You can't prove it. You are

afraid to arrest that girl. I'm onto you, Logan, and she is in it as much as I am."

"I don't believe it," said Logan.

"Did you tell the Governor?"

"No, I am giving you a chance."

"You are giving her a chance. You love her and you are kidding my sister. You worked her to find out about me. Well, a hell of a lot of good it did you. I tell you the girl got the money."

Scarcely had Claude finished his lying words when his father, seeing them by the light of Claude's cigarette, called Logan, saying that he wished to see him, and he curtly ordered Claude to sit on a bench near by.

"Well Mr. Burton," said Logan.

"I am afraid you have not lived up to your reputation in this post office matter."

"Indeed?" replied Logan coolly.

"Yes, Mr. Bender has discovered the thief."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, he has just received three hundred and fifty dollars in payment of the judgment. He took the money but cannot credit it until morning he told her, it being a legal holiday, but Betty gave it to him, and thirty-five dollars for costs. Now what have you to say?"

"Betty, Betty, my God, Betty!"

"Oh," said Bender pompously. "Us country detectives put two and two together. She didn't have it a few days ago for I asked her."

"Well," said Burton, "you arrest them, this girl and her father, they are both guilty. Or, will you permit one of our own officers to do it."

"Mr. Burton, I did not wish to arrest the guilty party now, and out of regard for you—and your guests, but, this is a case for the Federal Courts, and a Federal officer must do it. I'll attend to it later."

"Well, I don't intend to have them associate with my daughter and I intend to tell them now," said Burton grandly.

"You will understand my reasons later, but I insist, I ask you not to—please, it will humiliate me—let us do it quietly."

"Mistaken kindness my boy, I fear you will never make a great detective. But this little failure of yours does not make any difference with me as to your engagement to my daughter. Shall I make the announcement of it now?"

"I beg that you will not, Mr. Burton, not now. I am quite upset. The whole matter is such a surprise. I'll see the parties first."

"Very well, I'll let you alone for a while. Think it over my boy,—don't worry; you are going to get a fine wife, fit to be the lady of the White House. Come Bender, I want to congratulate you. I'm even with old Meredith at last for that strike."

"He will go to prison," said Bender, rubbing his hands.

"And the girl will be out of the way of my poor boy Claude," and saying that, the father left the place while Claude sat shivering with fear. And, yet, no sooner had his father gone with Bender than he came to where Logan was sitting, saying insolently:

"Well, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, you are not so ~~can~~ clever as you thought, are you? Smoke a cigarette and brace up. You know how it is now to get the third degree. You were going to make a thief of me, weren't you? You'd better marry my sister, and get dad's money and settle down on the mill, that's your limit. Not in Secret Service, you are too slow. Wouldn't believe the girl was guilty. I knew her years ago, she was my pal, and I——"

"Well, what?" said Logan with concentrated fury, seizing him by the coat and shaking him as a terrier shakes a rat.

"Oh, she was decent all right, only she was a thief."

Logan threw him down on the bench and Claude lighted a cigarette as well as his shaking hands would permit. Logan said to himself:

"I guess I'd better let that fellow alone. I guess Burton was right and I am a failure. I was afraid that her father was guilty and I wanted to save her the sorrow. She loves that cur and is shielding him, and I must send him to prison. It will break her heart. Poor little Betty, how she has tried to save him, and she has lost. Poor little girl."

Logan hastened away as he heard laughter and noise, as he was not in the mood for anything like that just now, and hardly had his shadow left the grass when Betty and her father came along and Betty led him to a seat, saying:

"Oh, it is a shame, it is cruel. My poor old Daddy laughed at and everybody pointing at him.

It is Burton and Logan and Claude, and that sneering sister of his. They shall answer for it. My poor old Daddy!"

Burton stepped forward saying: "Oh there you are. Well I am glad to have this opportunity to tell you what I have suspected for some time. Won't you sit down Miss Meredith?"

Others gathered around and listened as though they expected something unusual, but Betty said in a clear and resonant voice:

"No, I think it best for me to stand. I'll listen Mr. Burton, and then I may have something to say to you."

"Quite haughty, aren't you? Well, you won't have to stand long. In the first place you are a thief, and your father is a partner in the crime. I suspected you for some time, since I began to miss money. I waited patiently, for the time would come I knew when I would have my revenge. I would be even for that time your father urged the strikers against me, when he fed them and their families to beat me."

While Burton was thus talking he forgot that the most of those very strikers were standing about him, and some of them had sufficient conscience to realize what the old veteran had done for them and they knew that it was the failure to pay those bills that had reduced the old man to this point. Burton unheeding the dark looks that began to fall upon him, continued:

"Well, he beat me. It cost me many thousands, but I stood for it, and then he went broke for helping them. They did not help him in return.

He couldn't pay his debts, and he robbed the mail of my money. That means prison at his age. They won't consider that he was an old soldier—that cry won't help him. This same Uncle Sam that he fought for will send him to prison. That's how the Government treats old veterans."

"Go on," said Betty, standing by her father as though to shield him.

"And, as for you Miss, you tried to lure my boy away and make a bad man of him. When you were a child in short skirts, even then you tried to snare my child into a trap so he would have to marry you or else get some of my money to buy you off. Well, God was good enough to save him and take you away, where you could better play your wiles and sell your charms for a price. You became an actress, but they soon tired of you and you had to come back and try it all over again, but you didn't get him. He was older, he knew better, and was too much of a man to be caught by the charms of an actress, of a painted thing who plays for money, but you did succeed in one thing, you have helped your old father to finish his days in prison. You helped him steal from me and the Government, but you have reached your end, and you are going to jail which will be a Godsend to the community."

"Have you finished?" asked Betty, still with that stony calm.

"Yes; all but telling the guests here tonight



MR. MEREDITH PROUDLY INTRODUCES HIS DAUGHTER TO HIS COMRADES.

just what I have told you," and saying that he started to call those not already gathered about.

"Wait just a moment," said Betty, "I have listened to you, and now I want you to listen to me. Then I myself will call your guests for you and you can repeat your story in every detail—don't omit one word."

"You are a very brave girl, Miss Meredith," sneered Burton.

"Mr. Burton," she resumed, truth ringing in every word, "you have been so busy all your life making money that you have neglected the one thing in life, a little thought of what some one else might do. It is all you and yours—self—self—all selfish. You have even bargained and offered for sale to this hound of the law, your own daughter. Your poor foolish son, unfortunately born of a father whose brains were too much wrapped up in making money to bestow enough on him to make him anything better than a cigarette-smoking fiend without brains or the least spark of manhood. This same boy, your son, begged and implored and wrote begging me to marry him in spite of you and his family and everything. I have those letters. I refused him, drove him away from me. This same son has today a poor little woman dying in a hospital and a little boy, his boy, in an asylum for paupers in the hands of strangers, your own flesh and blood."

"It is a lie," said Burton, thickly, for he seemed choking.

"I heard you, now hear me. This same son,

your own flesh and blood, stole like a thief into my father's store last night and with these keys, your keys, with your name on them, opened your box and stole your money. I tried to prevent him and was choked and beaten before I succeeded in saving my father's name. This same son has been stealing for months, and you have been saying that the old soldier was the thief, the old soldier, my father, who suffered and bled and lost part of his body for you—and then you put the bloodhounds of the law to work to put me and my father in prison. Well the bloodhounds did not catch the thief—your son—but I did. He has one check that he stole about him now, or has it hidden. Have you ever tried to find who cashed the checks you say you have lost? I think you will find that your name has been forged, too. I am the only witness who can send your son to prison, but I didn't do it. I had suffered and I had pity not only for him but for his family—above all his poor suffering mother—for the poor little woman he dishonored, for the poor little baby he left without a name to be cursed through life. I hold the proofs. I am going to hold them. That is all I have to say. I want you to keep your word and tell the guests all you told me. I'll call them," and before any one could have hindered her Betty seized the bell rope that hung near and rang the bell loudly. This bell was intended to call the workmen about the place to the house, but until now had never been used. "Come on, everybody, all of you.

Mr. Burton wants to say something to you about my father."

Betty stood by the side of her father who appeared to be in a daze, and as the people from all parts of the grounds gathered, the veterans gathered about Betty and her father as by accident, but she was now wound to the highest pitch of excitement and scarcely knowing what she did took the flag, the old and ragged battle flag that had been so sacredly guarded by the men who had risked their all to capture it. With one deft movement she wound the glorious folds about her lithe young body and stood there before them all. Her father went to her and with the smile of a saint, he said:

"Comrades, I want you to meet my daughter Betty."

There was something so sweet and familiar in this simple action that the veterans kissed not only the pure brow of the young girl but caught a fold of her dress gathered in with the Flag and kissed that too.

Burton then rose unsteadily and said:

"Friends, I wish to say that a great many things tonight and have been said for weeks against our Postmaster, both by myself and family. I retract every word. I want to say that—I lied—but I did not know it. I want to beg his pardon."

Burton sank to a seat, covering his face with his hands.

There was a rustle as of a woman's dress in the shrubbery and a low sobbing sigh, but no

one noticed it but Claude, then he gave a hoarse cry and ran in that direction, but as just then the band struck up the national music, playing a noisy medley of the inspiring songs, the slight interruption had passed unnoticed. But Mrs. Burton had drawn near and had heard the whole terrible truth and had fallen to the ground. Claude had called a servant and together they transported the dying woman to the house. The only words she spoke were:

"Oh Claude, my son!"

Betty and her father stood the center of interest, but although Betty knew she had won in her fight for her father, she wanted to be at home where she could weep alone. Such victories cost more than lost battles sometimes.

Maude felt the very icy hand of death in her heart as Betty had told her story, every word of which bore the truth. She felt the death knell of her own happiness had sounded in them. She looked at Logan hoping for some sign of friendly sentiment, but his face was hard and cold as he looked towards her and her father, and she saw how the expression changed as he turned to Betty and her father.

Then the word passed about that Mrs. Burton had had a stroke, and the party begun so happily a few short hours before ended abruptly. There was some confusion as the guests hastened their departure and as happen at such times there were those who thought more of securing some souvenir, more or less valuable, while the children—

unrestrained—helped themselves to the cakes and fruits, until they could carry no more.

Betty and her father still stood the center of the group of comrades, Betty still half enveloped in the hard-won battle flag, as they, or rather she, felt that so long as there was a chance of denial or question she must remain. But Logan came forward, saying:

"Mrs. Burton is dead," and then he started toward Betty, but she looked at him with a world of honest indignation and pride in her father as she took his arm and they started away. When she had said "hounds of the law" he had winced as at a stab wound, but he could do nothing. Would she ever come to know the truth and could she forgive him?

CHAPTER XII

THE LEOPARD CANNOT CHANGE HIS SPOTS, BUT BETTY CHANGES HER NAME

Six months had passed since the memorable Fourth of July, which had held such tragedy for the Burton family. Burton had been obliged to own himself beaten then but his resentment never waned. The search for the persons who had cashed Burton's stolen checks had brought the truth to light. Nothing could save Claude from the clutches of the law, and he was sent to the Federal Prison instead of the old soldier who had been so unjustly accused.

Maude had followed her brother, and took rooms near the prison and visited him as often as she was allowed to see him. Her mother's death and the exposure made home no longer pleasant for her, and her father grew more and more morose and somber day by day. His business suffered as the operatives grew to hate him, and all that they did was like forced labor and not up to the mark. Sales fell off and there was a constant spirit of discontent.

Betty had been subpoenaed as a witness and was obliged to testify against Claude, and it was her testimony backed by the proofs and the trac-

ing of the forged checks that sent him to prison. Burton blamed her for all that had happened in his heart. He sought constantly for something that he could do that would harm her.

Jade Bender, mean and hateful as he was in the pursuance of what he deemed his duty, was nevertheless a strictly honest man, and the money Betty had given him on that night of the lawn party had been conscientiously paid in, and the receipt brought to Betty the next morning, so there was no sale of the grocery.

But so much had been done and said against Meredith as Postmaster that finally in spite of all that Logan could do that office was taken from Meredith and given to Jade Bender who had it moved to Burton's new building.

Betty had been wise enough to see that there was a secret enemy working against them and that the grocery business was bound to fail, for the new store farther up town offered groceries at less than cost price to undersell Meredith. She consulted with the G. A. R. comrades and they advised her to hold an auction of such things as she did not need, reserving all such goods as would keep indefinitely. They owned the house, and they could live on little and Betty could go to work in another town near by, in fact the very one where disaster had befallen the theatrical company.

Betty realized that the advice was good and so the auction was held and quite a sum was realized, as when the people came to understand that they could be doing Betty and her father a

good turn and themselves another in getting groceries at their own price they bid at a lively rate. So the store was sold out and the room that had heretofore been the store now became the parlor.

The ever deft hand of little Betty had made book cases of the counters, and where the soda water fountain once stood was now a large stove where the glass front gave a cheerful glow to the room. Neat rag carpet lay upon the floor with a few rugs of bright colors. The wide window now had snowy curtains, and in short it was a very pleasant and cheerful place, and many of the neighbors used to come and sit with the old man and chat and listen to his stories of the war.

Time had touched the veteran lightly and the same seraphic smile beamed on the gentle face. He had preserved enough of his old mental vigor to remember the things of long ago, while all the bitter and unpleasant things that had taken place during the last six months had faded from his mind. Always neat and soldierly in appearance, with that gentle smile which seemed to beam on all alike, friend or foe, he was a delight to those who knew him best and a hero for Betty to worship, and a child for her to protect.

The precious letter had been framed as Betty said she was afraid he would wear it out if she did not, and now it hung before the portrait of McKinley. It needed but this to fill the old man's cup of joy. His Betty with him, and his home his own and free from debt, nothing to do but putter about the house and have things all ready

for his precious child when she should come home from her toil—to watch her go in the morning and to look down the road at night to catch the first glimpse of her coming home. Was that not delight?

Betty worked very hard, for her strong young hands were swift and clever and she liked her work. She could earn enough and almost to spare for their support, and she had her father, her dearest possession, so why should Betty not be happy? Yet, nights, her pillow was often wet with tears, for do all she could she could not forget Phil Logan—Logan the traitor—the hound of the law, who had tried to prove that her father was a guilty thief. She hated him, she told herself so a thousand times, but in spite of all she cried at night when no one could know, for—she hated him most abominably—so hard that it hurt.

This was Christmas Eve, and the good and loving father, who had passed the day reading over the history of those dark days in war time when it was Christmas and the suffering boys in blue had, when they could, befriended those who wore the gray by sending them things which they could not obtain in the South. And the boys in gray were grateful and ready to reciprocate.

The early twilight was closing in, and Meredith lighted the hanging lamp, and pulled it up, with a small bit of mistletoe hanging to it. The fond old father of Betty laughed aloud in his glee at the sight. Then he lighted two other lamps, for, as he said:

"It shall be bright and pleasant when my Betty comes."

Sleighbells jingled on the frosty air outside as people passed going to the train, and the old man raised the shades to the large window and looked out. The snow shone whitely against the houses and trees along the street, and the light gave a glow quite across the road. It was five o'clock, and as he listened Meredith heard the whistle of the incoming train.

"She'll soon be here, bless her!"

Then there was a knock at the door, for now that this was no longer a public store Betty had made it understood that no one could open their door and come in as before.

Charlie stood there playing on his mouth harp which was his sole consolation. As he entered, he said:

"Merry Christmas, Meredith."

"Hello, Charlie, the same to you. Come in."

"Can't. Must go down to the train. Maybe there's some baggage to rustle. I guess you don't think it is so merry since you lost the Post Office."

"Oh, you are wrong. It is always Merry Christmas while I have my little Betty. She will be home soon, on that train, and we'll have two whole days together, Christmas and Sunday."

"Hum, how is she getting on down at Crawford? I s'pose she has to kill herself working and don't get much more'n nothing for it, and 's like as not she'll lose her position after the holidays."

"Oh Charlie, you always see the dark side of

things. She gets a fine salary, ten dollars a week, and she is forelady in that milliner store. She always did have taste. Betty is a mighty fine, sweet girl."

"I don't see how she manages with that. Costs carfare every morning to go and night to come——"

"Oh, she is satisfied, for she is with me every night, and we have mighty fine times together, Betty and me."

"Aw, it would have been better if she had worked here at the Corners but I guess Burton wouldn't let her since she sent Claude to jail."

"She didn't send him to prison but the Government did."

"Well she testified, and Burton never forgives. He'll never forgive her no mor'n he'd forgive you."

"You know Betty didn't want to, but that Mr. Logan s'peenied her and she had to, for you can't disobey the Government," replied Meredith with finality.

"Here's a letter for you. Got it for you out of the new Post Office. Say—it's fine, all brass all over, and thick glass, and shining wooden counters, and Jade Bender, he is all dressed up in new shoes, and shaved, and he is so stuck up he made me call him Mister this morning. Got gold letters on the window, desks at the side to write on. Say, this looks like a hen coop aside of the new Post Office—Jade's got two clerks. I tell you Logan Corners is going some."

The old soldier could not repress a deep sigh,

for this had been a cruel blow to him. But he said nothing. Charlie continued to "twist the knife in the wound" by adding:

"And Burton says that now that we have all the old fogies out of the way he will do more for the town. He expects to let the big room over the Post Office to the G. A. R. They are going to vote on it tonight—and going to march with a band. I s'pose you will vote against it. I would if I was you."

"No Charlie, I will not. I shall not be able to get out tonight. I am not so well, and snow under foot—and—the old coat does not look so well as I thought. My comrades will know what is best to do—but I think they will take it, for it will make a fine place for them."

"Ya'as, but Burton said lots of things agin them, and the way he has treated you ought to make some difference to them, if you would go and tell them. I'll help you up there if you'll go."

"Oh I guess Mr. Burton don't mean all he says sometimes. He is just busy and don't consider the old soldier's feelings. Charlie, I have something in me that tells me that everything that is, is right and will all come right, if you only think right and do right—and love your neighbor as your self and them that despitefully use you. What time is it Charlie, my old clock don't seem to keep as good time as it did."

"It is a has-been just as Burton says you are. Well, my watch says four-fifty. That train is half an hour ahead of time."

The watch in question got a good shaking and few extra turns to wind it up, but before any further damage could be done to it Luke came to the door dragging Sissy along and they declared that they were going to elope, which caused Charlie to insinuate that there was no need to do that as Sissy's mother would be only too glad to get rid of her.

Charlie begged Luke and Sissy to think well before making such a mistake. He had married Mrs. Henderface on Labor Day had—well—he advised them to think well—and then Mr. Meredith joined with Charlie to persuade the young couple to wait another year. Luke said:

"Well Sissy we will think of it. Ah, there's the train, and we must go. Mr. Meredith, I heard that you have been trying to get an appointment at the Pension Office in Washington, and Burton blocked it. Is that true or only rumor?"

"Oh no, it is not a rumor. I have written several times but have not heard yet. I would so like to get it since I lost the Post Office. You see I could watch the door and make myself pretty useful, and then I would meet my old comrades. I sent a copy of my letter to Washington."

"Well I hope you will get it. Mr. Meredith you certainly have been up against it. Sissy and I, we brought up a box of chocolates for you and Betty, and—Merry Christmas."

"I hope he'll get it too, but I have a feeling that he won't. Burton would knock his own

mother if she stood up agin him. And me and Mrs. Hen—I mean my wife, we want you and Betty to have this here chicken for your dinner tomorrow. She raised it and fattened it herself. Merry Christmas,” and Charlie deposited the mysterious parcel on the table and bolted, as he feared his wife would follow him.

“Well, it seems that we have some friends left after all. I guess I’ll look at the letter and then sit down till Betty gets here. I am very happy here with Betty but I wish I could get into the Pension Office to lift the burden off her shoulders. Brave little Betty, I am very happy tonight when I think of what a treasure she is.”

Then the old man, having read the letter again as it hung on the wall, sat down in his easy chair and laying his silvery head against the red cushion dropped off into a doze, and dreamed he heard military music in the distance, which seemed to him like the regimental bands of yore. He smiled in his sleep, and did not awaken when Betty tiptoed in.

She saw him resting and hid some of the parcels with which her arms were filled. Her cheeks were rosy red from the cold outside, and she brought with her some of the exhilarating ozone from the snow outside.

She whispered: “Here I am Daddy, just as hungry and cold and lonesome as I can be. One teenty little soft kiss won’t awaken him,” and she bent down to kiss the soft hair that lay out on the silken cushion. Then she hastened and hung up the wreaths she had brought, and was

about to put the mistletoe she had brought upon the lamp and saw the little bunch already there. "The dear Daddy, I won't let him know I brought any."

The old man started up and saw his idolized Betty and held out his arm for her and father and daughter were locked in the sweetest and purest of embraces. He said in tremulous voice:

"Oh it is my little Betty! I have been dreaming, and Mr. Logan said that letter was a great honor."

This unexpected pronouncing of this name was too much for the brave little heart to bear and she shrank as though from a blow. She said piteously:

"Please don't Daddy. Don't let's talk about that. It's Christmas and, look, I have decorated for you, and we will be just as happy as—happy as little birds in their nests. I don't have to work again till Tuesday, and what do you think, Mr. Adams, the proprietor of our store, gave each one of the girls two dollars and a half, and he gave me five because I am the leading sales-lady. Oh, I am getting on fine Daddy, and the walk to and from the station is just what I need for exercise. And I am so happy with you Daddy, no more worries, no heart aches and no more suspicions, and no more bad bills to fret about.

All this while the tireless little feet were trotting about and the little hands were putting things to rights. Then she found the chocolate and the chicken and they were the subject of

much delighted surprise. Betty said: "Ah, and now I shall not have to trudge up to the market. Isn't it fine and fat? I did not like Mrs. Henderface very much, and Daddy I came near stealing one of her chickens," and then with much laughter she told him of her arrival that fateful morning.

"Are you happy, dear, toiling all day for me? And are there not sweethearts?"

"There is where you are mistaken Daddy, I have a sweetheart."

"Betty! And you never told me. No secrets!"

"Oh, I can't tell you about this one."

"Look Betty, we are under the mistletoe, where lovers kiss their sweethearts, but yours is not here."

"Yes, he is right here and nowhere else. My dear old sweetheart," and then she put her bright head over on his shoulder and wept. Her father drew her over to the big old fashioned but comfortable sofa and they sat down, Betty now giving herself entirely to tears.

"Now dearie, tell your old Daddy what it is. I think you are kind of sorry you treated Mr. Logan so coldly——"

"No I'm not sorry."

"I am sure he liked you more than you knew, and you wouldn't let him explain——"

"He knows how to write."

"You surely couldn't expect him to write after what you said to him, and you know now you were all wrong and that he was spying on Claude and not on me——"

"Daddy, I verily believe you would find excuses for Judas Iscariot."

"Ah, now, Betty, 'fess up. He is a fine gentleman."

"He was in love with that Burton girl——"

"No, she was in love with him, and he had his duty to do. Now Betty, I see it all. I never thought that my little girl could allow such a mean and low down trait to live and grow in her mind, jealousy——"

"Well, everybody here says they have been together ever since they went away."

"Well, that might be so daughter."

"She never loved him as much as I—love you, Daddy."

"No dearie, but he is a very rich man and is one of the few men who do not believe in sitting down idly. His father is a very rich man——"

"That would never have made the slightest difference to me," she cried hotly.

"I know that, and I think he knows it too. But you wouldn't let him speak—wouldn't forgive——"

"Well he has had time enough in six months. So you see Daddy that it was just business. He has either married some rich Washington society girl, with a fine education and polished manners. I'm only a small-town girl—no—Daddy, it was just a little vacation for him—just teasing a poor girl to see how she would break her heart and then—well Daddy I never lied to you and I won't now—I did love him more than any

other being in the world except you—he didn't break my heart Daddy for I had you, but he put an awful dent in it Daddy and it hasn't straightened out yet, but it will. I am getting over it—a little longer Daddy and it will be all right. What made it hard was I never had a sweetheart—you know that it was all ambition with me. I wanted to be somebody, and have you proud of me, but when he came—he seemed so different, so honest, so on the level—well I loved Daddy, but it was not to be—I am where I belong—just a small-town girl and some day a small-town lover. You see I got punished, for I tried to go out of my class. I had too much ambition, but I don't regret it. I know where I belong, and as long as I have you and can take care of you and love you and you love me, why well, that's all I want—but say, I met Santa Claus down the street and he sent you something? Now close your eyes——”

The father smiling like a happy child closed his eyes as Betty had told him to do, and then she hurried, cutting strings recklessly, and unpacked a fine, thick dressing gown and pair of warm slippers, and then laughing as though there was not such a thing as care or unrequited love on earth she told him that he now might look. When he saw what she had brought him he said, while his lips trembled and his kindly eyes filled with tears:

“Betty, Betty, you dear good child! You are so good to me! And I didn't have anything for

my baby, my little baby. I'm so sorry that you spent so much money for me," and his trembling hands caressed the soft dressing gown as though it were too precious to be touched.

"Now don't feel bad about it or I'll think you don't like them."

"Oh but I do, and I want to put them on, and I'll wear them all the time. Oh how soft and light and warm. Oh my dear child, how nice and warm, and the slippers too I'll put them on. This floor is cold no matter how much fire we have and these will just keep me warm as toast. Now give me my letter from McKinley. I must put it in this pocket for good luck. And, oh, I got a letter tonight. It is in my old coat. Get it out dear and we'll see who it is from."

Happier than he thought he could ever be, with the evidences of his daughter's love wrapped about him, he sat in his chair. Betty gave him the McKinley letter and then sought the other, and as she brought it out she said: "Why Daddy, it is from the Pension Office in Washington. When did it come?"

"Why I don't know—oh, yes I do. Charlie brought it and I forgot. I'm a little forgetful sometimes. You read it."

Betty opened the letter with care, for something seemed to tell her that this was a very important affair. It said:

MY DEAR MR. MEREDITH: I have the honor to inform you that the position you requested has been granted in the Pension Department of the U. S. Government at a yearly salary of \$2,000.00. You will

report for duty Jan. 1st, 1910. Wishing you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, I am

Very truly,

JAMES R. BRONSON,
Pension Department.

Recommended by Phil. Logan, Jr., and Phil. Logan, Sr., Washington.

"Daddy!" cried the girl, throwing herself into her father's arms in a transport of delight.

"My little girl—they didn't forget the old soldier!" and then he saluted the photograph on the wall, standing and saying:

"God, I am thankful. God bless Uncle Sam, the President and the U. S. Government."

"The Stars and Stripes, Mr. Logan and his father," said Betty.

"Betty dear, your troubles will soon be over. Your father is young again. That awful shadow in my brain broke away then. I will work for you—you shall have fine clothes, you shall be somebody—now that is your Christmas present! Uncle Sam *does* take care of his old soldiers. Mr. Burton was wrong, daughter—he cares for his old soldiers."

"We have only a week to get ready, Daddy, and you must have clothes and railroad fare. Oh, Daddy, I spent nearly all our little savings, but we don't owe a dollar and we can leave Logan's Corners with a clear record—a clean record—for you Daddy."

"Yes daughter. A clean record. I am feeling a little tired, this good news was too much

for me—I want to get my clothes in order—what's that? It sounds like music?"

"It is Daddy, and it is stopping right here. Oh, it is the G. A. R. Only four left but they are all here with the band. Shall I let them in?"

"Yes Betty, yes. That music would put life into a dead man. Come in, come in, all of you and Merry Christmas. Come in."

The four old soldiers filed in and gave a military salute to Meredith and Betty and then to the flag and the two portraits. Then Cap said:

"We can't stop but a minute, but Charlie told us you were not well enough to come out tonight so we came here. We want your vote on the taking of the new lodge room and——"

"I vote you take it. It is warmer than the one we have now in winter and will be cooler in summer, and is more commodious every way."

"What did I say?" cried Cap, "he returns good for evil."

"Well that is the best way to do and I would not like to feel that my old friends and comrades should suffer for my lack of right thinking and acting, now when I shall so soon be leaving them," said Meredith with his old time sweetness. Cap misunderstood him and said shrilly:

"Come now, none of that. You will live fifty years yet——"

"I hope so, for my daughter's sake and my own. My dear old friends, Uncle Sam does take care of his soldiers. I have been appointed—you tell them Betty, for it has just come over me that I must leave you all."

Betty showed them the letter, and to keep from weeping they cheered and cheered, and then the practical little Betty said:

"Daddy, you will not want to sell the old home here. Why can't you all come here. A very little fixing would make it comfortable and it would be more like home than any hall."

"Betty, you have a wise little head under your curls. What do you say boys? Cap can take charge and keep it in order and you can see that what you would have to pay rent for elsewhere could go to him. I will pay my own taxes and insurance and repairs. Is it a bargain?"

Was it? The sight of five old men trying to see which could out-yell and out-hug the others told that story better than words.

Then the veterans each brought out a little box containing a present for Betty, not very expensive but souvenirs that she would guard her whole life. Then every one of the old men kissed the girl they all loved and shook hands again with Meredith and went back to their old lodge room to watch the night out.

"Well Daddy, what do you think of my father now? Gee but I am hungry. You lie down and I'll get something in a jiffy and we'll celebrate tomorrow." So the father with a happy face lay down and she hastened to get supper ready, and they ate with relish in spite of the stirring events of the day. After they had eaten, Betty sat down pen in hand to make up her little account and see just what and how much she need-

ed to get her father clothed and provided for while he dozed off.

"Well that's fine," she said, "but how can I get to Washington, buy Dad clothes, railroad fares and incidentals?"

There was a discreet knock at the window and she dropped her pen and went to the door and opened it to admit Sammy, who was resplendent in a cheap but flashy fur overcoat and high hat in the highest state of silky shine. His necktie was redder than ever in a more brilliant shade, and he had light trousers and remarkable white spats. Betty stood aside to admit him, smiling a frank welcome, as he said:

"The queen, upon my knees I salute you."

"Well Sammy I am glad to see you and in that make-up you seem just like old times. What has happened?"

"Lots. Betty, I am on the high road to success. I am married although I often said I'd never care for any girl in the world but you. Times were hard, and I married the soubrette. She is a rotten dancer. Of, of course, I love her dearly. Her father has a two hundred acre farm, cows, chickens, all sorts of other animals, and she is the only child, and my poor father-in-law is not long for this world. My mother-in-law departed this vale of tears some years ago, so you see I am on velvet."

"You are a bad boy, Sammy."

"No, Betty, but a thoughtful actor. The game is getting worse and worse, and if it don't get better very soon it is me for the cow business.

Of course I don't know anything about it but it can't be worse than ours now, and anyhow you get your three square meals a day. And I always did love the country. All actors do, and the dream of their lives is to get away from the madding crowd and feed chickens. Well Betty the "perfesh" lost a lot when you gave up. How are you playing? This stage setting here isn't a center door fancy or a palace."

"No Sammy it is only a plain kitchen in a rural play. I'm back with the old folks trying to forget it all."

"I hope it finishes good—but I guess I better not say any more—you ain't feeling good. Ah—er—say Betty, didn't I owe you a little money when we left the troupe. I can pay you now—I'm pretty flush."

"No Sammy. I understand and thank you with all my heart."

"Well come over and see the show. It is pretty rotten but the Jays don't know it. Say, Betty, I can lay my wife off and you can go on and she'd be glad of a rest and you can take her place. You'd be a scream. I told her all about you and she sent her regards and hopes you'll come."

"Do you really mean that Sammy, would you want me?"

"Sure, it is a cheap little show but you'd make it a hummer and we'd divide the profits. K and E would certainly come after us."

Sammy spread out a three-sheet poster which made Betty think of the days when she was one of them, and she said:

"Those were good old days Sammy, good old days."

"Well, think it over Betty. I'll drop in, in a few days."

Sammy went out and Betty sat there torn between duty and a longing to be back before an audience where she could forget. It was not so much the lure of the footlights as the constant toil which would occupy so much of her time that she would forget for at least a few hours a day. But she looked at her father lying there so old and so helpless without her, and, like many another woman, duty called her and she sunk self in doing that duty. Besides, would it not be a labor of love, for Betty truly and deeply loved her father. And could she desert him now? No, a thousand times no. But how could she get the necessary money to take them both to Washington? She took her pen again and said, counting: "Two tickets to Washington, about sixteen dollars, a new suit for Daddy and they must be fine, twelve dollars, and that makes twenty-eight, and ten dollars till Daddy gets his first salary, and that is thirty-eight and I have just twenty-one. I must raise seventeen in a week."

While the curly little head was bent over the paper in a puzzle of ways and means the door had opened and Phil Logan had come in so quietly that she had not heard him, and he had actually sat down beside her, and said in her ear:

"Let me lend it to you."

Betty turned and in wide-eyed surprise could

find nothing else to say but the same words she had said while in the freight car the first time she had seen him: "Well, I'll be dog gonied."

"You said that very thing when I met you before. Let me lend you the money, your credit is good. You paid me before. I am very anxious to have you borrow it."

"Am I awake, is it really you?" asked Betty. All the things she had planned to say to him in case they should ever meet again had flown from her mind.

"Yes, it is really me—Phil Logan, cured and well save for a bad case of heart trouble. Betty——"

"Didn't you and Miss Burton hitch?"

"I haven't seen Miss Burton since her brother was taken to prison," said he, laughing with sheer enjoyment of her odd little phrases. And she was so angry at herself that she should have used them in her confusion.

"And couldn't you find a cure for that trouble of yours in Washington?" she asked meaningly.

"I haven't tried, besides I don't like the medical treatment they give there. I prefer the small town doctors, and if I don't get cured of my heart trouble here today I'm going around the world again."

"I don't know what you mean. Say, how is Claude getting along?"

"Do you feel sorry for him?"

"I feel sorry for any one in trouble."

"Well I am told that he is a model prisoner."

He is trying to get a pardon and he says he will marry Bessie who is well and has been so faithful to him. She and Miss Burton live near him. He told me everything. Betty, I am going to ask your forgiveness for something. I was led to believe that you were secretly married to Claude, and when I learned the truth I took father's special and rushed here to you. Betty, I want to loan you that money."

"I'll take it," said she, with her cheeks scarlet.

"And, Betty, I have a little Christmas present for you. Will you wear it for my sake," and he took a beautiful ring from his pocket and slipped it on the roughened finger. It was my mother's and she gave it to me for you, and—Betty—you won't need to pay for your railroad trip to Washington, for mother and father are coming through here next week in his private car and we will all go together, that is if you and Mr. Meredith will do us the honor."

There was a noise and confusion as of many persons outside and Phil went to the door and looked out. Pretty nearly if not quite all the persons who have been most closely interested in this story stood about, and Phil closed the door behind him, saying, as he stepped outside:

"May I ask what is the matter that you have all gathered here? Is there a fire on the roof or anything?"

"Oh, no," said Bender, "but we heard that you had come and we wanted to make you welcome."

"I appreciate your kindness very greatly. I

shall be here several days, and when I leave Miss Meredith, who will have become my wife, and her father, who has just received his appointment in the Pension Office in Washington, will accompany us in my father's car which will be back to take us. Mr. Meredith is weary and as I have a number of things to talk over with my—Betty, I will bid you all good night and a merry Christmas," and Phil went into the house, closing and locking the door.

There was a faint scream as Maude, who had learned that Phil was returning, had hastened home hoping to meet and win him, heard this announcement. This was the death blow to her hopes and she went home with her broken-hearted father to a lonely life filled with sad regrets.

"Betty," Phil began—but we will leave the two young people to their joy, and let them be happy without spying eyes.

THE END

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